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MRS. SIDDONS

Mrs. Siddons Reciting before Garrick

Original drawing by B. Wesley Rand

94035

Beaux & Belles of England

Mrs. Sarah Siddons

Volume II.

Written by

James Boaden

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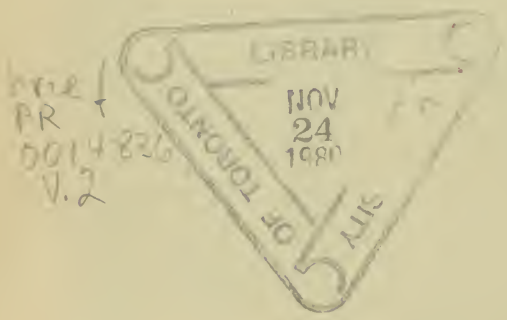

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MRS. SIDDONS

CHAPTER I.

THE reader will have observed the peculiar attention paid to Mrs. Siddons last season by their Majesties, who made a point of seeing her in all the characters which she had sustained. The honour of such patronage, so marked and persevering, was reserved for our great actress exclusively. A royal command introduced her second season in the character of Isabella. The late king was an excellent judge of acting, and might be said to be well studied in the respective schools of Quin and of Garrick. He here found the dignified declamation of the old school combined with the exquisite pathos of the new. I cannot doubt, however, that it was the exact propriety of her utterance that led to the appointment of Mrs. Siddons to be reading preceptress to the princesses.

The honours paid by all ranks to the delightful ornament of the stage kept, however, in due

bounds; the enthusiasm neither became fanatical nor profane, — it placed a few indifferent pictures and worse likenesses upon the walls of our dwelling-houses, was most free and bounteous in presents of various kinds; but it stopped on the side idolatry, and the drama yielded the votive palm to speculative politics.

The republicans of the city, I remember, did not rest here as to the historian Catherine Macaulay. She could discover that "the prelates of Charles the First paid him an impious flattery." But I heard of no protest from the modern Clio, when her high priest, Doctor Wilson, set up her statue in the parish church of St. Stephen, Walbrook: the fierce Moloch of regicide in the very sanctuary of mercy.

> "Within his sanctuary itself their shrines
> Abominations — and with cursed things
> His holy rites and solemn feasts profan'd."
>
> — *Paradise Lost.*

But our doting doctor did still more: he dedicated a temple to his idol, for her residence, not to her memory, and presented to her a mansion called Alfred House. (Alfred, a patriot certainly, but unluckily a king.) He furnished it with splendour, supplied a long retinue of servants, and stored the library with the literature of freedom. At Alfred House she was enthroned on her returning birthdays, and incensed by odes recited by

gentlemen, and medals presented by our doctor himself. But one little speck presented itself to the eye; the celestial Doctor Graham had restored the fair historian to health, and was, therefore, allowed to lay at her feet a copy of his modest works. He approached, it appears, on her weak side, for she finished by marrying his brother. The reverend doctor, as is usual in these cases of literary devotion, "breathed one sigh of ineffectual tenderness," and set himself with reluctance entirely at liberty.

The attentions paid to Mrs. Siddons, as they were reasonable and temperate, were quite unexceptionable and more lasting.

Of her performances now, it is only necessary to repeat the order in which they succeeded each other; namely, Shore, Euphrasia, Calista, and Belvidera, and to add that her attraction did not in the least decline; and that the rival theatre, by whatever talents supported, and great indeed they were, was doomed to see a long and unbroken line of splendid carriages, in a sort of birthday procession, slowly pass the foot of Bow Street, which lent its space, too, at the close of the night, to the noble vehicles of those who were at the other theatre.

In the midst of these triumphs, I will not omit to mention one opportunity afforded Miss E. Kemble of acting Rosalind, on the 16th of October. Lee Lewes wanted to play Touchstone, in humble

imitation of Woodward, but the result, I believe, never transpired; and as to the lovely Rosalind, she was smothered, whatever power she possessed, except when Kemble himself called upon her in the "Black Prince," and the "New Way to Pay Old Debts." Her elder sister kept her rank, but did not extend her range, by acting with Mrs. Siddons in Alicia and Almeria.

Mrs. Siddons had hitherto left Shakespeare untouched, and the first character which she acted was selected as affording some relief to her frame, really exhausted by the dreadful fatigues she had undergone, with no other intermission than was afforded by her travelling from place to place. However honourable to her, the intimacies she was compelled to cultivate with the noble, the polite, or the learned of the sister kingdoms called for no slight efforts of those spirits which, had it been practicable, should all have been reserved for the theatre. The part, therefore, thus considerately chosen was Isabella in "Measure for Measure," which she acted for the first time in London on Monday, the 3d of November.

They who judged only by the bustle and noise, the rage or protracted sufferings of a heroine, considered Isabella to call for something less than the powers of this actress. But if measure is to be given for measure, what lower talent could possibly express this "ensky'd and sainted virgin,"

whose inborn purity creates a dignity beyond that of power, and a logic so firm and convincing that it even hides, at times, the poetical beauties of its own diction? The moral energy of Isabella is, perhaps, unequalled in the volumes of Shakespeare. Portia's solemn eulogy upon mercy is nothing to the truly dramatic charm of what follows:

"O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.
Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet;
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder. —
Merciful heaven!
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle: but man, proud man,
Dress'd in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep."

The duke in this play is a character of great moral wisdom, and Shakespeare had, from the beginning, determined to unite him suitably to Isabel. But lest so much staid gravity and wisdom should be thought too aged for such a purpose, he makes, in the very outset, Friar Thomas throw out a suspicion that his very retirement has

love for his motive. This the duke disclaims in good set terms, —

"*Duke.* No! holy father; throw away that thought:
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom."

He yields at last to a wisdom and virtue fully proved, and worthy of the throne. The poet, at the close of the play, touches the subject very guardedly, —

"Dear Isabel,
I have a motion much imports your good;
Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline
What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine."

It was at one time a good deal the fashion to end all comedies with a "Call in the fiddles," or a "Strike up, pipers," — and our modern stage cooks could not permit Shakespeare to remain at the close the master of his own creatures. See how awfully it is now managed.

"For thee, sweet saint, — if for a brother sav'd,
From that most holy shrine thou wert devote to,
Thou deign to spare some portion of thy love,
Thy duke, thy friar, tempts thee from thy vow."

And then we have the "spirit shining in its right orb," blessing in course "both prince and people," and a royal maxim to boot, —

"To rule ourselves, before we rule mankind:"

all which may, perhaps, come from the muse of Charles Gildon, but really is not worth inquiry.

I take the liberty to smile at the stage discovery of the duke in the last scene of this play, with all his regal paraphernalia, with difficulty concealed under the outstretched garments of the friar — as if it was not the man who was recognised but the clothes. At this rate, let the machinist also contrive for him a portable chair of state which may safely be hooded with the robes, and a small globe and sceptre ready for handling upon the seat, that he may burst complete in the full blaze of sovereignty upon the scared and unsuspecting offenders.

Our most extraordinary actress performed the first scene of the second act, before Angelo, with the most perfect ease, grace, and impression, from the first rebuff to her suit —

"I had a brother then —"

(which by the way is classical idiom) through all the arguments deduced from fitness, satire, or religious considerations. As her mind quickened in the altercation, her figure seemed to distend with the golden truths she delivered, and malignant possession appeared alone able to compel the resistance of the wretched Angelo.

Nor was she less remarkable in the scene with her brother, where she stood before him, as a searching, scrutinising spirit, to detect any quail-

ing of feeble resolution, any even momentary preference of shameful life to lasting honour. I loved particularly the strong but tuneful accents of her satisfaction, —

> "There spake my brother! there my father's grave
> Did utter forth a voice."

But when the storm rose, upon his change of feeling, nothing could exceed the effect of her exclamations, —

> "Take my defiance! die! perish!"

After this scene the part of Isabella is no more, — she has only to await her reward in the safety of her brother and the passion of the prince.

As I do not think the coincidence has been hitherto pointed out, I may remark that, in the famous speculation of Claudio as to what, after its separation from the body, may become of the delighted spirit, Shakespeare's

> "And blown with restless violence round about
> The pendant world"

is clearly from Cicero, ("In Somn. Scip."): "Corporibus elapsi circum terram ipsam volutantur."

So desirous were the royal party to see anything new from Mrs. Siddons, that on the Wednesday after its first performance, "Measure for Measure" was honoured by the presence of their

Majesties. If the play of Shakespeare contained much that was complimentary to the public and private virtues of the present sovereign, the other theatre, the previous night, offered the annual incense of Rowe's "Tamerlane" to the memory of William the Third.

However Rowe might misconceive, certainly misrepresent, the character of Tamerlane, Bajazet was a most outragous caricature of Louis XIV. Of whom it may be bare justice to assert, that he reigned in the exact spirit of his people, and his reign is not more properly his than theirs. It is a concentration of the egotism, the ambition, the taste, the refinement, the gallantry, the luxury of the French nation.

I presume tyrant Aickin did not suffer much from this temporary invasion of his brutal rights by Stephen Kemble, who was not likely to tyrannise long in Bajazet. Henderson spoke Tamerlane beautifully, Wroughton was extremely affecting in Moneses, the ladies were highly respectable, and had Bajazet appeared in his iron cage during the evening the show had been perfect. After this piece was performed a first time, as we now have it, O'Keefe's delightful entertainment of "The Poor Soldier," which, while we are permitted the enjoyment of either the national humour or its music, cannot fail to amuse the people of the United Kingdom.

However agreeable to me the brilliant success

of Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kemble, there was one other great artist, who was making such a display of masterly talent at this time, that it would be the height of injustice not to take a more than cursory notice of his efforts. I allude to Mr. Henderson, in whom resided nearly all the critical fame of Covent Garden Theatre. The high-erected deportment, the expressive action, the solemn cadence, the stately pauses of that great original tragedian, Kemble, with the magic of countenance and form to bear up his style, have by degrees won us from the school of ease and freedom and variety and warmth, and all the mingling proprieties of humour and pathos, as Shakespeare founded it, and as it was taught by the professor whom I have just named. The styles were certainly incompatible with each other. They were excellences to be seen apart: no man, I think, ever seriously wished for Henderson and Kemble upon the stage together. Their voices would have harmonised as little as their manners. Neither could have been expected to concede at all to the other. Henderson would never have stopped, and Kemble never gone faster. The declamation of Mr. Kemble seemed to be fetched from the schools of philosophy; it was always pure, and perfectly correct. It demanded admiration, and secured it. Though a studious man, there was no discipline apparent in the art of Henderson; he

moved and looked as humour or passion required, and was not so much approved as felt. The cadence of Mr. Kemble was artificial, and formed upon the principles on which the verses he spoke were constructed. Henderson cared little about the measure of the line; he would not consider the fame of the versifier while the heart was to be struck. He "lightened" upon the word on which the charm was deposited, and gave all the rest to hurry and neglect. What he once said to Pope showed the element of his style. It was in "Othello," if I remember rightly, —

"Haply for I'm black!"

His friend Pope, having a remarkably fine sonorous voice, had given their full time to all the words in the line, "Haply for I am black." Henderson, imitating the hurried suggestions of a tortured imagination, would have him instruct the audience as fast as he himself conceived, "Haply for I'm black." His reading of the great scenes in this noble tragedy agonised himself and everybody fortunate enough to hear him.

This great man — dressing as carelessly as did the Quins and Cibbers, quite regardless of the costume, and the tailor, and the cephalic artist, who makes even a wig speak powerfully for an actor — now gave to the few real amateurs of the art his Hamlet, his Lear, his Richard, his Sir

Giles, his Macbeth, his Iago, his Falstaff; and a great variety even after these. The reappearance of Mrs. Crawford, in Lady Randolph, on the 13th of November, afforded him an opportunity of affecting in Old Norval beyond everything that has succeeded him. The rustic simplicity and tearful earnestness with which he uttered the following lines banished in an instant all the boards and lamps of the stage:

> "As I hope
> For mercy at the judgment seat of God,
> The tender lamb that never nipt the grass
> Is not more innocent than I of murder."

But he enters upon the most interesting narrative that perhaps was ever written, — the stormy night; the shrieking spirit of the waters; the cry of one in jeopardy; the circling eddy below the pool; the basket whirled round and round, drawn speedily to the bank; and within it, his gentle and expressive action aiding the language and almost painting the portrait, —

> "Nestled curious, there an infant lay."

That infant the spectators knew to have been saved, they had just seen him flourishing in manly beauty; but this was no shield against the instantaneous shriek of a mother's agonising effort to know all, the sublime "Was he alive?" of Mrs. Crawford. It checked your breathing, perhaps

pulsation; it was so bold as to be even hazardous, but too piercing not to be triumphant; sympathising nature found itself completely captive, spell-bound in the circle of these mighty magicians.

As to the subject of this play, Home saw something in Lady Barnard's "Gil Morice," [1] but more, much more, in the "Merope" of Maffei, or that of Voltaire. To use the happy figure of the French writer, "he was in the situation of one to whom an Eastern king had made a present of the richest stuffs of the country, but the monarch would no doubt permit the foreigner to make them up in the fashion of his own." This Home has done by retaining much of the pastoral simplicity and deadly feuds of Scotland. It is almost incredible how Aaron Hill, in his "Merope," has perverted the beautiful expression of Voltaire.

[1] The locality is there — and Home had at first preserved Lady Barnard's name:

"But it was for a lady gay
That liv'd on Carron side."

We have the daring spirit of the Douglas in the noble child's message to his mother:

"And bid hir cum to Gill Morice,
Spier nae bauld baron's leave."

He perishes in consequence of the baron's jealousy, not suspecting him to be her son.

There is a singular mystery as to the production of this beautiful ballad, which, at least in print, appeared but a short time before the play of "Douglas."

But, as the latter has taught us, "il faut toujours beaucoup de temps aux hommes pour leur apprendre qu'en tout ce qui est grand on doit revenir au naturel et au simple." (Lettre à M. de Maffei.)

This was a favourite theme with antiquity, and the tender Euripides wrote a play upon it called "Cresphontes," of which only a few fragments now exist; yet even these seem to have been remarked for their homely wisdom by the author of "Douglas," *e. g.:*

> "The only gains which ought to be pursu'd
> By man, are those whence no repentance springs."

Again, and still more in his manner:

> "Collecting all our friends, we should bewail
> The new-born child who comes into a world
> Where mischiefs swarm around him: but bear forth,
> Amidst rejoicings and auspicious songs,
> Him who is dead, and ceases from his toil."

But enough for the present of a poet whom, as far as "Douglas" went, Mr. Hume, historian, thought worthy to be named with Shakespeare and Otway.

Mrs. Siddons had now the prospect of acting in some few plays with her brother, Mr. Kemble, and the first effort to combine them was happily without offence to any other performer. "The Gamester" had not been acted for four years. Smith did not care for the part of Beverley; into

which, therefore, Kemble slid with every propriety; and as to Brereton and Palmer, they could not be more at home than they were in Lewson and Stukely. J. Aickin acted Jarvis delightfully, and Mrs. Brereton, by anticipation, was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Siddons, by performing Charlotte to her Mrs. Beverley.

The passion of gaming, said the author of the "Night Thoughts," needed such a caustic as the last scene of this tragedy. I know not what may in fairness be called the vices of this passion, — perhaps it may easily conduct to all, — but an earnest gambler could not fail to point out that Beverley is the victim rather of the rancorous hatred of a rival in love; of a schoolfellow long noted for sullen mischief, sordid and cruel, whose manhood had confirmed and extended all that was bad about him. Stukely still labours to supplant Beverley in the affections of his wife. The gambler, I believe, has but one passion.

The character now sustained by Mrs. Siddons was one of fond suffering virtue; she can really account herself rich while she fancies her husband's affection unabated. She, therefore, repels at once the suspicions with which Stukely would impress her, while disclaiming all design to alarm her. Her answer was beautifully pointed by the actress:

"*Mrs. Bev.* Nor have you, sir. Who told you of suspicion? I have a heart it cannot reach."

In the scene of Stukely's absurd attempt to excite jealousy about the jewels, nothing was ever better spoken than —

"Know, sir, my injuries are my own, and do not need a champion."

But all the gradations, from strong reluctance to credit him to a compelled belief of Stukely's story about a mistress, till he unmasks, by hinting revenge to her, and proposing himself as the means, had the most surprising effect. Her eye was always full of meaning, but it "flamed amazement" when she uttered these lines:

"Would that these eyes had heaven's own lightning, that, with a look, thus I might blast thee! O villain! villain!"

The recovered dignity, too, was very striking, —

"Keep thy own secret and begone."

But, perhaps, the finest *coup de théâtre* was the quick contradiction of Jarvis about the quarrel with Lewson, and the eager rush up to his breast, as if she would at once banish him, along with testimony so alarming, —

"No; I am sure he did not.
'Tis false, old man; they had no quarrel, — there was no cause for quarrel."

The merits of the actress must not keep me from remarking Moore's charming observance of nature. The danger of Beverley leads to a momentary oblivion of Jarvis's important services and affectionate zeal; "old man" is the rather disparaging term which Mrs. Beverley annexes to her contradiction.

Of equal beauty is the exquisite delicacy of this inimitable old man, as described by Charlotte, who, when he has hurried off a creditor from Beverley's door, "begs pardon that his friend had knock'd so loud." It is not without tears that I notice a trait so perfectly divine. When the stage teaches such conduct, it is one of the best, as it is certainly the most pleasing, of moral instructors.

Notwithstanding the elegance of Moore's genius, and the excellence of his character, he was rather unpopular; and, however ludicrous the prevention [1] of the audience or the alarm of the author, Dr. J. Spence bore for the first four nights the credit of "The Gamester," which lost some of its admirers when it recovered its owner.

The scene of contest between Lewson and Stukely, the first of the fourth act, has been attributed to Mr. Garrick, and I should think the suggestion of it likely enough to proceed from him. It is the scene of and for an actor; one written in full parallel with that between Horatio

[1] I thus use the word on the authority of Dryden, with the sanction of Doctor Johnson.

and Lothario. As the hits in a fencing match have been applied to the witty contests in comedy, I may call these a resemblance to the scene between Hamlet and Laertes, where the points of the weapons are

"Unbated and envenomed."

Aware, as I am, that "The Gamester" was written partly in blank verse, I confess the scene here alluded to does not seem to me to have proceeded from the pure taste of Moore. *Ceci sent des coulisses*, —

"And Beverley
Shall yet be sav'd, be sav'd from thee, thou monster;
Nor owe his rescue to his wife's dishonour."

If Roscius contributed this scene he was generous indeed, and meant only to strengthen the play, for he acted Beverley himself. The dialogue possesses his characteristic love of smartness.

As to the general impression of the play, if it was not originally popular, I should not, with the author's friends, attribute its cold reception to the arts of those whose vice it exposed, but to a kind of moral disgust to see the worthy and elevated made the prey of heartless calculating villainy, drawn into inextricable misery and perishing by poison. As to the hero himself, few will be of Lewson's, that is, the author's opinion, — "Save but one error and his life was lovely." No; that

one error had absorbed the man entire, and he had ruined all those who reposed in full confidence upon his honour and his love. The family mansion had dwindled into a lodging; the sister's fortune had been stolen and lost; the wife had been beggared, slighted, and plundered even of her ornaments; his son cheated of his inheritance, robbed of what death even was expected to bestow. Beverley was like our savage ancestors, in Tacitus, staking at hazard till all was gone, and then risking personal and lasting slavery. "Tantâ lucrandi perdendive temeritate, ut cum omnia defecerunt, extremo ac novissimo jactu de libertate et de corpore contendant." [1]

The acting of this play exhibited a perfection in the art which has never been exceeded. But what must be done when the performers are gone who so enchanted the public? Answer: "Rebuild the theatres."

Their Majesties, although they had again commanded "The Grecian Daughter," to enjoy the virtuous energy of the heroine as acted by Mrs. Siddons, allowed "The Gamester" to run on without a wish to be present, — the interest is of that kind which oppresses more than it improves the heart. It is as Cowley expresses it:

> "And on my soul hung the dull weight
> Of some intolerable fate."

[1] "De Morib. German." S. xxiv.

A wish had been entertained to see Mr. Kemble in some play with Mrs. Siddons; and Shakespeare's "King John" having been gotten up with great attention, a royal command honoured the first night's performance of it on Wednesday, the 10th of December. In this place I am not called upon to enter particularly into the performance of John by Mr. Kemble. It would display his mastery in the art, the extreme subtlety of his mind, and his power of impersonation. It is one of the characters in which he has in every spectator fairly substituted his own face and figure for the picture sense of King John. You think of the Lackland of history and Shakespeare; but call upon the fancy for an image, and she immediately returns you the dark, sullen brow of Kemble, his rigid features and solemn manners; walks with his gait, and murders in his voice. I do not say that the picturesque of an actor's person will do everything, but to be externally like your object secures a welcome at the first appearance; you have only to maintain an interest, not struggle with unwilling reception.

The character of Constance had been the *chef-d'œuvre* of Mrs. Cibber, and had been acted by Mrs. Yates with what Davies thought kindred talent; but his own description of her effects shows me that Mrs. Yates could only have touched the assumed irony or the majestic sorrow of her predecessor; the piercing notes of wild maternal

agony were not in the scale of her voice. Mrs. Crawford had these assuredly, and to an extent almost "too terrible to enter human hearing." Of all the performances of the great subject of these memoirs, no one was more questioned, or, in my opinion, less questionable, than this of Lady Constance. She here took ground upon the inspired realms of Shakespeare; and it might be, therefore, a point with the disingenuous of the critic tribe to compliment her as far as Otway or Southern could carry her, but "to hint a fault and hesitate dislike" when she seized on the too brief but striking heroines of our greatest poet.

A fashionable writer of the day, the same who had so cruelly persecuted her sister, Mrs. Twiss, ventured almost to restrict her merit to the speaking of a single word in the line, —

"For grief is proud, and makes his owner stout," —

which the reader may remember is one, but the very weakest perhaps, of a speech which she delivered with an energy of sorrow so mighty as, seated but on the bare earth, rendered the splendid chair of state less venerable and majestic.

"I will instruct my sorrows to be proud;
For grief is proud, and makes his owner stout.
To me, and to the state of my great grief,
Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great
That no supporter but the huge firm earth

Can hold it up: here I and sorrow sit;
Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it."
(*Throws herself on the ground.*)

Sure I am she had uttered nothing up to that time that possessed a tithe of the power by which these wonderful lines are sustained.

Upon the coming in of all those royal recreants by whom her cause had been abandoned, and the distinct announcement of the marriage with Blanch, what could equal her impression while exclaiming as she rises:

"A wicked day, and not a holy day!"

Again:

"A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!"

one of the very boldest flights of him who "flew at infinite." After the furious demand of "war — no peace," and the withering contempt that clogged the very name of Lymoges, who can remember her look, her action, and her tone, and not be sure that, in real life, such a Constance prepared the victim for the future sword of Faulconbridge?

"He liv'd a coward in his own esteem."

The only other scene, the fourth of the third act, is too well known to the readers of Shakespeare to make it necessary that I should quote from it. Constance is too impassioned for hope;

she sees the future in the instant. Arthur in the power of her enemy is already dead to her, and it is in another world that, worn down with early sorrow, she fears she shall not know him. Her prophetic soul has disposed of him in this. She therefore does not linger in expectation, but expires of frenzy before his own rashness rather than his uncle's violence has ended her pretty Arthur. In the exit of Constance the sharp shrillness of the organ itself will do something for an actress not highly intellectual; however vehement in her exclamations, Constance has meaning in her language; this was truly given by Mrs. Siddons, and not an inarticulate yell, the grief of merely savage nature.

I preserve the dresses of Mrs. Siddons where I find a note of them in my papers: in Constance she wore a black body and train of satin, and a petticoat of white, disposed in certainly the most tasteful forms of that day. The true actress is in everything an artist; the genius before us dishevelled even her hair with graceful wildness.

By whatever power of writing adorned, — the frank bravery of Faulconbridge, the quick succession of opposite tidings, and the fate of John, — it was dangerous to show such a meteor as Constance, and linger two acts further after she has disappeared. Such is the inconvenience of chronicle plays; passion demands one termination and history another: you call on individual inter-

est as your aid, and are ruined by your auxiliary. It is the Æneid after the fate of Dido.

That the theatre should teach history is little extraordinary. A most ingenious writer, William Godwin, was now publishing sketches of history in six sermons!

But, whatever might be the motive for acting John at the theatre, it was not then so popular as it was expected to be. Two scenes of Siddons, however exquisite, were not enough for those who had been accustomed to see her occupy every act of plays more essentially female. Kemble, too, was much nearer excellence than he was to his subsequent steady attraction. At the other house, Henderson was acting Macbeth to vacancy, with the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Bates, and Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge both in the theatre, and Mrs. Crawford only absent upon leave. The Trunk-maker, however, assured that fine actor that, in 1759 and 1760, he had sitten quite cool at the Macbeths of Garrick and Pritchard! "I beg cold comfort," as King John exclaims.

In a former page, with the proper freedom of a critic, I have pointed out the charm of the great scene in "Douglas," as it was acted by Henderson and Mrs. Crawford. Perhaps the most serious moment of the professional life of Mrs. Siddons was that in which she resolved to contest even Lady Randolph with her rival. She wisely made her impression on the night of her benefit, — it

secured the greatest measure of encouragement, if any apprehension at all existed. She had many advantages in the competition, — youth, beauty, a finer figure, more power of eye, a voice in its whole compass sound and unbreaking. Her declamation, too, was more studied, finished, and accurate. She was sure to give a better reading of the part; the only question was, what was to balance the storm of passion by which her great rival had surprised and subdued a long succession of audiences?

I cannot but think it a peculiar happiness to Mrs. Siddons that she seems through life so little to have imitated what other performers did in the parts she acted. I willingly believe this not to have been sufficiency, as despising others, or disdaining help; but from a settled conviction that she could only be great by being truly original, and that she ought to deliver her own conceptions of character with absolute indifference by what other artists they were either disputed or confirmed. How the fact may stand is of little moment, but I think, if her first audience to Lady Randolph had been asked for an opinion upon the point, the answer would have been uniform, that no one could suppose that she had ever seen Mrs. Crawford in the character.

Before we examine her own performance, it may be proper to inquire what support she received from the other actors on the scene with her; and,

first, the disparity was immense between Bensley, the Old Shepherd of Drury, and Henderson, the Norval of Covent Garden. Bensley looked one part of the character truly, —

"For he had been a soldier in his youth."

But pathos rendered his voice ragged as well as repulsive, and he never, as to his feet, either stood or walked with the character of age. His helpless action had a character of restrained vigour; he implored pity in the noisy shout of defiance. His understanding, however, was of a superior kind, and it rendered him always respectable, and sometimes nearly excellent.

Brereton, in Douglas, was a tragic actor, which Lewis could never be but by the greatest courtesy. I could have wished the son less confirmed in manhood, less bulky, I mean, in reference to the person of Mrs. Siddons; but Palmer, in Glenalvon, was gigantic, and happily towered far above him. Then he had the "ravishing stride" of Tarquin himself, and was quite tragedian enough for this miserable shred out of the skirts of Shakespeare's Iago. Farren at the one house, and Wroughton at the other, were equally at home in the "bauld baron," Lord Randolph. The Anna, by Miss Wheeler, was rather undercast. She is more than the faithful attendant upon Lady Randolph; she is neighbour to the dearest secrets of her bosom. Miss Kemble would

have here been exactly the point desired; looking intelligence, her sympathy would have strongly aided the passion of the scene, and the congenial nature would have justified so important a confidence. I measure these things by no prompter or treasurer's standard, — the salary goes with me, and should go, for nothing; it is the demand of the part that is to be considered, the combining interests of the drama.

How is the moppet of some loose man of fashion, whose little power is smothered in the waste fertility of her personal attractions, and who, therefore, is all prettiness, and affectation, and constraint, — how is such a one to catch the key-note and continue the harmonious elocution of a great actress; still further, as Shakespeare strongly expresses it, how is she to —

"Tend her in the eyes, and make her bends adornings?"

But the great La Clairon shall herself teach us the importance of a confidante. "I remember" (she writes) "being exceedingly unwell at a time when I had to act Ariane (Ariadne), and fearing that I should not be able to go through the fatigue of the character, I had caused an easy chair to be placed upon the stage, to sustain me in case I should require it. In fact, during the fifth act, while expressing my despair at the flight of Phedra and Theseus, my strength did fail me, and I sunk almost senseless into the chair. The intelli-

gence of Mademoiselle Brilland, who played my confidante, suggested to her the occupation of the scene at this moment by the most interesting attentions about me. She threw herself at my feet, took one of my hands, and bathed it with her tears. In the speech she had to deliver, her words were slowly articulated, and interrupted by her sobs. She thus gave me time to recover myself. Her look, her action, affected me deeply; I threw myself into her arms, and the public, in tears, acknowledged this intelligence by the loudest applause." After this tribute of the Siddons of the French stage to Mademoiselle Brilland, nothing is wanting but the actual speech, broken so judiciously by her sobs, and graced by her expressive attentions, and that is with great certainty supplied by the page of Corneille. Thus it stands:

"NERINE.

Calmez — cette douleur; — où vous emporte — t-elle? —
Madame, — songez — vous — que tous — ces vains projets —
Par l'éclat — de vos cris — s'entendent — au palais?"

The French critic cannot fail to see how admirably the address of the actress is seconded by the language of Corneille; and I am not at all sure that this accidental heightening of the scene should not pass into a custom, and the invention of Mademoiselle Brilland *brille à jamais dans la tragédie d'Ariane!*

I have many reasons for wishing to press this event upon the English actress. It is true, in general, that little attention is paid to the inferior characters, and such intelligence might often be thrown away upon our noisy audiences; but, if the effort strike one true admirer of the stage, it will not be lost, nor will the imitator of Mademoiselle Brilland remain long in obscurity. The quickness and adroitness of the French confidante I do not quite expect, however, from my fair countrywomen.

In considering the performance of Lady Randolph by Mrs. Siddons, the attention will seize upon the capital point of distinction between her and Mrs. Crawford. It has been said that the execution of her "Was he alive?" was so piercing that it was triumphant; but was it just under the circumstances? They must be accurately stated. Assassins hired by Glenalvon assail the life of Lord Randolph — he is preserved by young Norval. A pursuit, directed after these ruffians, brings to the castle a stranger who was found lurking in the wood, and who, on being searched, is discovered to have upon his person very costly jewels, surmounted with the crest of Douglas. Of these circumstances Lady Randolph is accurately informed by her faithful Anna, who herself discerned the cognisance so important to her noble mistress. They enter together to the examination of the wretch in custody; and ob-

serve what passes between them, and the conviction of Lady Randolph that her son certainly perished, or the jewels could never have been in possession of any stranger. Observe, too, the necessity of avoiding any disclosure from acute feeling.

"*Anna.* Summon your utmost fortitude, before
You speak with him. Your dignity, your fame,
Are now at stake. Think of the fatal secret,
Which in a moment from your lips may fly.
L. Rand. Thou shalt behold me, with a desperate heart,
Hear how my infant perish'd."

Here are two points given of much weight in our decision: caution as to disclosure, and conviction as to the child's death, whatever the stranger has to tell. His narrative is in every memory, I had almost said in every heart. The infant is described as found nestled curiously in a basket, which the eddy of the boiling torrent has thrown up. The question, "Was he alive?" is not, therefore, to be uttered as if the answer in the affirmative gave any hope of his present existence; nor does the answer, "He was," at all change the tendency of Lady Randolph to believe him destroyed. A breast agitated so as to shriek out Mrs. Crawford's question ought to have been lulled by the answer she received. But is this the case with Lady Randolph? By no means; the answer yields no relief: persisting in her

notion of his fate, she now, incensed as well as afflicted, exclaims:

"Inhuman that thou art!
How could'st thou kill what waves and tempests spar'd?"

I am certain that Mrs. Siddons thus reasoned the passage, and that it was the conviction of her mind such an explosion was unsuitable that led her into a manner less alarming but more natural. It was, therefore, neither ambition of difference, evasion of difficulty, or fear of competition that produced her hurried, breathless mode of putting that question, on whose effect the Lady Randolph of her rival principally rested.

Often have I examined, by the only steady lights, — the page of the author and that of human nature, — these *tours de force* on the French stage, as well as our own; and very rarely indeed is there one of which an accurate reading does not dispel the charm. In a crowded theatre, with beauty before you, and the most affecting thing in the world, a woman's voice thrilling to your soul, the nerve is gained, and the judgment dethroned. When the Dumesnils and Crawfords were, therefore, said to know "the readiest way to the heart," it may always be proper to inquire whether they did not surprise that fortress into a surrender whose garrison they had "frighted with false fire." However delightful the charming agonies may be, inflicted by these enchantresses,

we should yield only to true emotion; and even in ecstasy itself be found *cum ratione insanire.*

Having thus, perhaps, disposed of the great point of comparison, I believe the effects of the minor passages were uniformly on the side of Mrs. Siddons, — her narrative had more interest, her attention more intelligence, her ascendency more awe. In the scene with Glenalvon, villainy sunk under her glance, and her action added definition to a general term. "Thou art known to me," was the most expressive of dignified but contemptuous menaces.

The narrative to Anna in the opening of the play evinced the soundness of her taste. The poet never failed her, and she in perception was another self. She knew the magnifying power of a diminutive as the representative of hasty joy, and used it exquisitely in the description of her union with Douglas, —

> "Three weeks, three little weeks, with wings of down."

One of the lines of this narrative has done the most delicate service in nature ever since the play was written:

> "I found myself —
> As women wish to be, who love their lords."

But we can hardly, current as it is, expect to hear it again so spoken, as it mournfully lingered from the half-alarmed modesty of this finished orator.

If Doctor Johnson had intended to do justice to any writer of the North, he might have commended Home for the beautiful image which follows, so very Shakespearian, and yet not his:

> "Can thy feeble pity
> Roll back the flood of never-ebbing time?"

He has in "Othello" what might have suggested it, — "his Pontick sea"

> "Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on."

But genius only can thus employ the materials of genius. Any inspiring subject found in Home deep pathos and the true poetic style; but his mind was not fertile in combinations, and he seems not to have mastered any great variety of characters. I read "Agis" and the "Siege of Aquileia" languidly, in spite of prepossession; and wished, for the fame of the modern stage, that their author had written only "Douglas."

A few points of that *chef-d'œuvre* still await us which derived an accession to their beauties from the inimitable actress. The comparison of the fancied happy mother of Norval with herself, — the discrimination between two persons whom the audience so keenly anticipated to be one, —

> "She for a living husband bore her pains,
> And heard him bless her when a man was born:"

a feminine feeling beautifully announced by the poet, —

> "Whilst I — to a dead husband bore a son,
> And to the roaring waters gave my child."

She was sweetly interesting, too, while comparing her boy with blooming Norval, —

> "Whilst thus I mus'd, a spark from fancy fell
> On my sad heart," etc.

This spark from fancy (how could it fail?) kindled a flame in every maternal bosom around her. Her eye was so humid and lustrous, and her brow looked the chosen seat of fancy. She then determines to be the "artist of young Norval's fortune." I wish she had dared to break through the cross-bars upon the prompter's copy, and allow Lady Randolph to utter the following beautiful simile as it came from the imagination of Home:

> "'Tis pleasing to admire! — most apt was I
> To this affection in my better days! —
> Though now I seem to you shrunk up, retir'd
> Within the narrow compass of my woe.
> Have you not sometimes seen an early flower
> Open its bud, and spread its silken leaves,
> To catch sweet airs and odours to bestow;[1]
> Then, by the keen blast nipt, pull in its leaves,
> And, though still living, die to scent and beauty?
> Emblem of me; affliction, like a storm,
> Hath kill'd the forward blossom of my heart."

[1] Stealing and giving odour. — *Shakespeare.*

It was reserved for Home to vary at least the application of the famous "*Ut flos in septis*" of Catullus, in the "Carmen Nutipale" —

"Quem mulcent auræ, firmat sol, educat imber."

Through all the Italian and Spanish and French poets, down to the homely version of Gay in "The Beggar's Opera," the subject compared has been the virgin preserving or losing her purity. But there is nothing, even in the poet of Verona himself, equal to this line of Home's:

"And, though still living, die to scent and beauty."

There is, in the fourth act of this play, some little inconsistency. Lady Randolph had written by old Norval, to the youth, her son, to meet her at midnight in privacy, to explain to him circumstances of such moment as not to be trusted to the very air of Lord Randolph's residence. By accident Lord Randolph and his kinsman Glenalvon are summoned to meet the valiant John of Lorn, and his Lady and Norval are left together. She addresses him thus:

"This way with me. Under yonder spreading beech,
Unseen, unheard, by human eye or ear,
I will amaze thee with a wondrous tale."

There is no indication of the scene changing; yon beech must be at some distance, a

more "removed ground," suited to the disclosure; yet here, without retiring, she shows him the jewels, tells him who was his father; and throwing herself upon his neck, acknowledges that she is his mother. The wondrous tale is already told; nothing remains but the recovery of his lands. For the stage arrangement no more would be necessary than thus to change the first line:

> "While Randolph entertains his gallant friend,—
> Unseen, unheard," etc.

In the fifth act the meeting in the wood takes place, and at the midnight hour, as previously arranged. With respect to Mrs. Siddons, in this act, there was no question about her superiority, and her passions were displayed in the tones of harmony. Her great rival seemed to me the first of a school, in later periods much admired, which deemed discordance the natural ally of anguish, and tortured the ear to overpower the heart — forgetful of the great master's precept:

> "In the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."

Mrs. Siddons, a little deferring to costume, relieved the sable body and train of Lady Randolph by a great deal of white covering upon the bosom,

which took with graceful propriety the form of the ruff. And this was much, in those easy times, when nobody thought of risking the laughable in the correct.

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CHAPTER II.

AFTER all the petty cavils and prejudices long radicated, the character of Lady Randolph may be considered as sealing the reputation of Mrs. Siddons. The natural tendency of popularity so vast and lasting might be conceived to beget a confidence which no previous instance had sanctioned; and notwithstanding the serious disclaimer of all pride, published in the early effusion of her gratitude,[1] some caution seemed to be necessary, lest she should imagine herself to hold by a tenure not extended to such giddy habitations as the hearts of the multitude.

[1] She knows the danger arising from extraordinary and unmerited favours, and will carefully guard against any approach of pride, too often their attendant. Happy shall she esteem herself if, by the utmost assiduity, and constant exertion of her poor abilities, she shall be able to lessen, though hopeless ever to discharge, the vast debt she owes the public. — D. L. T., Dec. 17, 1782.

Johnson would have said — perhaps did say — "She has raised herself and her family from the honours of Wolverhampton to those which a theatre royal can confer; she has established her sway over the passions of all, from the sovereign to the mechanic; she sees respect and affluence the produce of her genius, and has a right to be proud."

A very intelligent contemporary, a member, too, of the profession, and a man of letters, thus, perhaps, more than cautions the delightful novelty: "Mrs. Siddons has in Belvidera, as well as many other parts, not only attracted the attention, but absolutely fixed the favour of the town in her behalf. This actress, like a resistless torrent, has borne down all before her. Her merit, which is certainly very extensive in tragic characters, seems to have swallowed up all remembrance of present and past performers; but as I would not sacrifice the living to the dead, neither would I break down the statues of the honourable deceased to place their successors on their pedestals. The fervour of the public is laudable; I wish it may be lasting; but I hope without that ingratitude to their old servants which will make their passion for Mrs. Siddons less valuable, as it will convey a warning to her that a new face may possibly erase the impression which she has so anxiously studied to form, and so happily made."

Thus did Davies temperately express himself at the very period of time which I am now passing over. He adds, what I can seriously confirm, that the comedians complained that their farces did not tell after the tragedy of Mrs. Siddons; but he forgot to add when such a complaint was ever made before. But whether Davies, from generosity or policy, hinted at equality, and presumed decline of favour, the consideration was likely enough in pru-

dent minds to beget great care and economy; and purchases in the funds were announced as disposing of the large sums gained by her benefits. Here at least some gleam of comfort broke upon the discontented; where there was the most incessant labour there was probably avidity of gain, possibly avarice. It cost little to make the assertion, and she now began to be assailed for penurious habits, hardness of heart, and a remarkable want of charity.

> "For if a cherub in the shape of a woman
> Should walk this world, yet Defamation would,
> Like a vile cur, bark at the angel's train."

Among the lighter ornaments of detraction, one epigram, I remember, accused her "of lingering behind the rest of the congregation in the gallery of St. Martin's to avoid a present of benevolence to the Westminster Dispensary." With all the eagerness of general charity upon such occasions, I do not believe, even in the gallery of St. Martin's, that there could be found so little curiosity as to leave Mrs. Siddons behind in this race for the church-warden's plate.

Another and a subtler foe involves her with Mrs. Crawford, Miss Younge, and the other imperial queens of the stage (Mrs. Abington and one or two more excepted) in a censure drawn down by the most extreme hardness of heart, parsimoniousness, haughtiness, and inattention to the voice

of affliction even among the fallen empresses of their own profession. This now was really judicious, for the whole weight of it would fall on the lady of the party about whom the public mind was then occupied. The same article took care to assert the superior merits of Mrs. Crawford on the stage, and represented the fame of Mrs. Siddons as borne up only by the vapour of fashionable folly.[1] The merits of the actress have borne her triumphant through all changes of the moment, though her great admirers have, to be sure, occasionally disgraced themselves.

Such were the commencements of that malevolence which will be shown hereafter to excite clamour against her, even in the seat of her empire, — the theatre itself. Miserable as these arts are, they claim a record; that it may be seen how keenly envy follows great success, and that in the profession which gratifies self-love more quickly and forcibly than any other all the gales are not halcyon: some, like a sudden frost, check all self-complacency, and others blight for a time our good will to society and reliance upon its justice.

The list of first-rate female characters in tragedy

[1] It will scarcely be believed that a contemporary thus abused her: "The judicious would as soon see Bensley murdering Lear, or kicking up the heels of Alexander the Great. Her head seems to dance upon wires, like that of Punch's antic queen; though a Gentoo might think it more resembled that of the china mandarin in our drawing-rooms." Yet even this wretch admired her beauty.

is not very extensive. I mean such as are strongly discriminated by manners. The complaint of Aristotle is likely to apply to the modern periods of every drama. Character will not be so pronounced as that you should be able always to anticipate the decision of the speaker.[1] On the 6th of March, 1784, Mrs. Siddons acted, for the first time, Hall Hartson's "Countess of Salisbury." Of this poet, educated by the excellent Doctor Leland, the originality has been questioned on account of the following very beautiful effusion, spoken by Mrs. Siddons:

"Never, oh, never more shall Ela run,
With throbbing bosom, at the trumpet's sound,
To unlock his helmet conquest-plum'd, to strip
The cuisses from his manly thigh, or snatch
Quick from his breast the plated armour, wont
To oppose my fond embrace. Sweet times, farewell!
These tender offices return no more."

A friend, it seems, complimented the author upon his very ingenious use of Homer in the pre-

[1] Dacier at least so understands the great master; and he thus whimsically illustrates him from Virgil: "Si Virgile ne nous avait fait prévoir aucune résolution d'Enée, et que nous fussions incertains s'il obéira aux dieux, ou s'il leur preferera Didon, en ce cas il n'y aurait point de mœurs, quelque diligence qu'Enée fit pour hâter sa fuite."

If Virgil had not led us to foresee any resolution of Æneas's, but we were doubtful whether he would obey the gods, or prefer Dido; in that case, there would be no manners, whatever speed he might make to run away from her.

If passages acquire even a joke in translation it is something.

ceding passage. Mr. Hartson disclaimed, as he well might, any knowledge of the obligation; and, like a true friend, the reminder went his way and asserted that, not knowing what it contained, Mr. Hartson could not be the author of his own play. The play, observe, was taken by the pupil from Doctor Leland's romance of "Longswood, Earl of Salisbury," — the doctor was in all certainty as well acquainted with Homer as with Demosthenes. But what obligation in fact has Homer conferred upon either master or scholar? — literally in English this:

> "From whom Andromache shall ne'er receive
> Those glorious arms, for thou shalt ne'er return."[1]

Nor is Andromache even the speaker; what is said comes from Jove himself. The passage, in original Homer, begins at verse 201 of the 17th book.

The reader sees that Hartson has given and well given the manner of chivalry. His picture is the unarming the accomplished knight by the soft fingers of his lady on his return from battle and victory; and it is minute enough to have gratified Don Quixote himself.

The great actress carried the countess through three representations, and on the 24th of April

[1] *ὅ τοι οὔ τι μάχης ἐκνοστήσαντι*
Δέξεται Ἀνδρομάχη κλυτὰ τεύχεα Πηλεΐωνος.
— *Iliad*, B. 17, v. 207.

acted Sigismunda, in the tragedy of "Tancred and Sigismunda," being the night of her second annual benefit. This play was first performed on the 18th March, 1745. Patriotism in those days was at least as friendly to an author as poetry. The author of "Liberty" dedicated his play to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and Pitt and Lord Lyttelton interested themselves so successfully with Garrick that Thomson had his best services in Tancred. The two statesmen attended the rehearsals, to the benefit, it is said, of the piece, — the actors availing themselves of the instructions of men so highly admired. When it is considered that the performers were Garrick, Sheridan, Delane, and Mrs. Cibber, — but we know the attention to rank in the playhouse.

Mrs. Cibber is said to have been extremely like Mr. Garrick, below the middle stature like him, and possessing features which exhibited the true alphabet of passion. Davies says they might have been thought brother and sister, — a sort of advantage which Kemble and Siddons fully enjoyed, with the greatest elegance of figure.

Sigismunda opens the play, and rather awkwardly. The king touches, it seems, his last moments, and Tancred is gone out hunting. She, therefore, till he shall return, very quietly details to Laura all that seems to her mysterious about his birth; her father, she adds, reared him in Belmont's woods, with "princely accost, nay, with

respect," language not very intelligible: but after relating her no knowledge to Laura, she suddenly recollects that the young lady probably knows much more of him than she does, and we have an *à propos* rather comic:

> "Laura, perhaps your brother knows him better.
> What says Rodolpho? does he truly credit
> The story of his birth?
> *Laura.* He has sometimes,
> Like you, his doubts."

This friendly young lady, however, opening the praises of Tancred, Sigismunda seizes the theme, and copiously pursues a subject so inexhaustible, when her father suddenly enters. He orders her to retire; but Sigismunda venturing an inquiry as to the king, he tells her of his death, and calmly relates the manner of it. After a second command, she leaves him to his interview with Tancred, now returned from the chase. Sigismunda here is nothing. There is but little for her either in the scene with Tancred; a rising alarm that his greatness may disturb their union, some commonplaces as to the sacrifices of monarchs to the public welfare, and the first act leaves her without a point.

In the whole second act Sigismunda only once appears, and that is oppressed with grief and passing silently through the back scene.

The third act is opened by Sigismunda sitting

in melancholy rumination; and here Mrs. Siddons found something to work upon; though I must think the language remarkably cold and weak. The contrasted conduct of Tancred, however well pruned (for Thomson is redundant and heavy), produced some effect. The entrance of Siffredi to his daughter brought out the great actress:

> "Hopes I have none! — those by this fatal day
> Are blasted all."

Where she determines upon her future conduct as to Tancred, the delicacy of her question was very finely given:

> "What would you more, my father?"

When the wily statesman has disclosed that "more" in the proposed union with Osmond, all the little endearing supplications, the references to her mother, which Nature taught Otway, and Thomson echoed pretty exactly, produced delightful effect from the long sterility that preceded. Laura comes into the design of her father, inveighs against Tancred, and aids her to make herself a wretch.

On the presentation of Osmond by her father the utmost skill faltered out:

> "I am a daughter, sir — and have no power
> Over my own heart. I die. Support me, Laura."

The fourth act is really beautiful. The explanation of her lover, the suspicion as to her father, the determination to preserve principle in whatever misery, the terrible interview with Tancred, the entrance of Osmond and the result, — all required only the "words that burn" to be of the very highest power; but the actress supplied all by the eloquence of eye and gesture.

Of the fifth act the interest is in the surprise of the king by Osmond in the chamber of his wife. An author, after a death-wound, may keep a heroine alive as long as his interest requires; but extreme length of conversation is, I believe, precluded by nature, and four long speeches no art ought to insist upon making after the powerful hand of death is felt in the blow.

Mrs. Siddons, however, rendered the death of Sigismunda tenderly perfect; and we should have admitted her right to appear after it, like Mrs. Cibber, in the character of the Tragic Muse. Perhaps the circumstance preserved in the original epilogue might lead to the noble picture of her by Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted certainly in the present year [1784].

Whether the suggestion came from the mind of Thomson, or one quite its equal, the President's own, I must leave unsettled; but the Muse of Tragedy led him to Michael Angelo, whose inspiration had executed the Sybils and Prophets in the Vatican; and he seized as a model for his design

the Prophet Joel, with his two attendant figures behind the chair.

Joel is supposed to have been a contemporary of Hosea, and to have lived about eight hundred years before Christ. Michael Angelo, perhaps on no authority, has represented him as advanced in life, the hair already gone from the top of the head, but what remains of great strength and character: he slightly inclines over a scroll, which is of great width, in the form of Greek manuscripts. The greater mass is in the right hand, and the left sustains the portion which he is reading. The right foot is bare and advanced, the left retires within the folds of the garment; and an ample cloak, which covers the shoulders, falls in massy and majestic folds across the knees of the figure, which are so sundered as to allow the weight to assume the lines of grandeur. The Book of Joel is but three chapters, and treats but of three subjects, — the Babylonian captivity, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the Last Judgment, which, it should be observed, is the subject of the grand ceiling of the Pope's chapel, of which the prophets are angular decorations. Such the great portions of the mighty whole.

Sir Joshua had here a difficulty; he had to combine portrait with mythology, the woman with the muse. Had he intended the latter merely, the substances of the dress would have been more solid, and contained fewer small parts; as he

blended the characters the materials are of modern usage, and the forms alone exceed the dignity of the actress's toilet. The style of decoration chosen for the head and shoulders seems to have been, from a variety of portraits, his own decided taste, and suited to the peculiarities of his system of colour. The figure retires a little to the left side, the right arm depending over one arm of the massy chair, the left, raised on its elbow, resting upon the other. The kind of expression given to the face, which is very beautiful, seems an abstraction of Tragedy; contemplating its essence rather than its forms, its effects rather than its properties. Its ministers attend behind in the Aristotelian shapes of Terror and Pity; the first advances trembling with the bowl of aconite, the second droops over the reverted dagger. The turbid atmosphere, while it sustains, accords with the figures, to which it adds its elemental strife, only less dreadful than the war of the passions.

When, in the year 1774, Sir Joshua pronounced his "Sixth Discourse," which treats of the use of the inventions of others; when he showed that conceit or indifference avoiding such resources would soon, from mere barrenness, be reduced to the poorest of all imitations, he was little aware that in ten years from that date he might have extended his arm to the magnificent portrait I have been describing, and, as his modesty would have chosen to put it, exclaimed, "See, gentlemen,

behold my obligations to Michael Angelo." The original picture is now in the collection of Lord Grosvenor, and, by his lordship's most liberal politeness, accessible in the summer to all who wish to enjoy his collection; and you are not permitted to gratify his servants for the respectful attention which they are seemingly happy to show the visitors honoured with his lordship's card.

Mr. Desenfans had a duplicate of the picture now in Dulwich College. As I once had frequent opportunities of inspecting the latter picture, I may as well record that it seemed to me inferior to the original in force, which will certainly surprise no artist. Sir Joshua inscribed his name and the date, 1784, on the hem of the garment, as borne to posterity by Mrs. Siddons. I am happy to say that the union thus given is never likely to be sundered, for, though the picture must one day perish, the engraving of Haward can be renewed for ever. The expressive language of Mr. Burke is alone adequate to the fame of such an artist, and I select this picture to justify his praise. "He was the first Englishman who added the praise of the elegant arts to the other glories of his country. In taste, in grace, in facility, in happy invention, and in the richness and harmony of colouring, he was equal to the great masters of the renowned ages. In portrait he went beyond them, for he communicated to that description of the art in which English artists are the most

engaged, a variety, a fancy, and a dignity derived from the higher branches. His portraits remind the spectator of the invention of history and the amenity of landscape. In painting portraits he appeared not to be raised upon that platform, but to descend to it from a higher sphere."

Mr. Burke inspected the progress of this picture with his characteristic ardour, and, with a *sic itur ad astra*, pronounced it to be the noblest portrait he had ever seen of any age. If the great actress, when it unfolded the full magic of its perfection before her, could repress all feeling like pride, she was a model of humility, as well as grandeur, which the world has seldom seen.

The second season of Mrs. Siddons closed on the 13th of May with a sixth performance of Belvidera. She acted fifty-three times between the 8th of October and her last night, that is, allowing for the oratorios in Lent, nearly once in every three nights of the company's performance. The thermometer of attraction thus arranges the various characters she acted. Isabella, seven times; Mrs. Beverley, seven also; Belvidera and Lady Randolph alike, six repetitions; Shakespeare's Isabella, and Thomson's Sigismunda, five each; Euphrasia and Constance, four; Shore and the Countess of Salisbury, three; Zara, in "The Mourning Bride," two; Calista, one.

It could not be expected that an equal sum should be drawn from the public, yet the popu-

larity of the actress continued the same through both seasons. Nor do I think, in a pecuniary point of view, that the combining her brother's excellences in the same plays added to the receipts. Compared with her, there were many who considered him cold and artificial. During the summer recess the war of paragraph continued in town, and means of annoyance very unexpectedly arose from a member of her own family. Miss Kemble had been retained by the influence of her sister, in a situation of great respectability in the theatre, and I have shown one effort of her powerful advocate to correct the malignant severity of public criticism. But this was not all. Mr. Steevens, whatever were his views, took great pleasure in expatiating upon this lady's acquirements, and asserted in his tour of diurnal influence (and he had a tongue to persuade) that diffidence alone prevented her from dividing the crown of tragedy, though in what proportions he was perhaps too prudent to state. It is fair to suppose that, with the friendly access he possessed, he did not refrain from making the young lady's own ear acquainted with the important discovery that her mind was "every way stronger and more cultivated than her sister's." [1]

Perhaps some of this trash as to the comparitive strength of mind of these sisters had no basis

[1] See his letter, dated 27th of July, 1784, in Mr. Hayley's posthumous "Memoirs" of his own life.

but the supposition that the attentions of old Mr. Sheridan were preceptive, and that the actual strength of mind evinced professionally by Mrs. Siddons seemed striking enough to imply a judgment superior to her own. But Mr. Sheridan has passed away, and all his lectures of elocution. She had attended to no preceptor when Henderson pronounced her the first of actresses. She differed essentially, radically, from her brother, Mr. Kemble, through life; and if ever the efforts of mortal wore a uniform character, from the commencement of its career to the close of it, Mrs. Siddons may truly be said —

"To be herself alone."

She knew better than any one how to individuate character; she was engrossed by it completely; her very form, expression, gesture, voice itself seemed to be bounded by her strong conception of the part she acted. She had more attention than I ever saw to what was doing and to be done. She seemed never to be thinking of an audience, and they gratefully repaid her by thinking, where she was, of nothing but herself. Who has ever yet taught to add intensity to emotion, and to communicate new dignity to the sublimity of poetic expression? Nor is this the strain of required panegyric, the grace which an author may think it discreet to bestow upon the subject on which he works. Were Mrs. Siddons my enemy

I should speak thus of her as an actress, though I might naturally regret that the incense cast upon her altar procured only aversion to her admirer.

The prudence which was so strong a feature in the character of Mr. Siddons had been convinced of the permanence of his wife's attraction, and they, consequently, had taken a house in Gower Street; and she returned the visits of her fashionable friends in a carriage of her own. There was no ostentation about it. She sometimes came to the theatre to see others act, and always paid the greatest attention to the performance; but she did not, like some others, sit remarkably forward, and throw her whole person, I was going to say, into the lap of the audience, under the pretext of applauding strongly those whom she admired. She never applauded at all, and this was judicious. She was sitting with their judges and hers.

But indecorous as a contrary habit would have been, and dull as the poor brutes must have been who did not feel this, I recently turned over a long string of paragraphs, the gist of which was her penury of praise, and her cruelty in refusing the sanction of her public approbation to those whom such a testimony would have benefited. The writers forgot that her coming presumed some expectation of being entertained, and some little proof of being so is implied by a veteran performer's sitting out a whole play with unintermitted attention.

I shall not risk the doing injustice to persons long since departed whose practice was said to have been different; those who can censure what is really good are likely enough to invent authorities for what is bad in such cases. But if it is supposed that any of her rivals had the liberality to praise the talents of Mrs. Siddons, I am too well informed as to their greenroom sneers and friendly predictions of returning good sense in the public not to give such a notion the most decided negative.

That I have seen Mrs. Abington at Colman's applaud Miss Farren is certain; but no two actresses in the world differed more widely from each other than these two ladies, however they may have acted the same characters; besides, from circumstances, the greater actress might be rather serving herself than the beautiful successor to her refined cast in comedy. She also demonstrated how free she was from jealousy by this attention to a rival; the impression general in the house was that it was too strongly marked. I do not imagine that it was levelled at Mrs. Siddons, though among the writers attached to the Thalia of that period were usually found the bitterest censors of her serious sister. Something of a nature not quite theatrical might account for all this, — the general reception of Mrs. Siddons in the fashionable world. The patronage of Mrs. Abington by ladies of rank was somewhat select.

During the summer recess Mrs. Siddons acted at Edinburgh eleven nights. I look upon the distinction she met with in that capital as one of her chief triumphs. There was, and always will be, found there an audience never surpassed in its intelligence, — high alike in taste and knowledge. The number of first-rate professors, mingling much in society, renders polished life fond of literary attainments, and the public, in its very amusements, less gross than the more mixed audiences of London. The manager had only to state to them that his offers to the great actress had been of considerable weight to induce them at once to agree that the admission to the pit on her nights should be five shillings. Nobody was idle enough to hint a doubt that the acting they then saw was infinitely more finished and perfect than any that they had witnessed. Her last impression was made in Euphrasia, a character of which the situations are always either brilliant or affecting. The truth is that Murphy was by no means more indebted in tragedy to French models than he was in comedy. In the former he grounded himself upon Crebillon, Voltaire, and Belloy, and in the latter mixed together Molière and Destouches ; and in both obliged us with pieces admirably adapted to the stage. The real power of his own genius lies certainly in his farces. Yet he knew well the different characters of the two rival nations ; and whatever he borrowed assumed the English dress

with such perfect ease as to pass for native with those who did not demand a scrutiny.

Dublin and Cork succeeded, and the summer yielded, naturally enough, a harvest greatly beyond that of the winter season, even with its two benefits. Such incessant fatigue, however, became at last too much for her health, and part of her routine was given up. It could hardly be expected in these summer excursions that she could spare time to act for the benefits of performers, and, if she did, that she should do so unpaid would have been a palpable injustice to her family; but theatrical mouths in London were soon clamorous with outcries against the hardness of that heart that would not play for West Digges unless he paid her fifty pounds, and that had so turned against Brereton, her hero, her Jaffier, that even money would not propitiate her; she would not act for him at all, which blighted all his hopes, and greatly distressed both his circumstances and his mind. Here, therefore, was a strong and unlooked-for reinforcement to the clamour already noticed; and the theatrical world suggesting to the newspapers, a vast deal of the most positive assertion was poured out in the daily prints, which was canvassed in the morning at the tea-table, and the rest of the day occupied more of the general attention than any *ex parte* statement to the prejudice even of a gentleman ought to excite in liberal minds. But greatness is always in danger.

As to the performing for Mr. Digges in Dublin, it was an affair of pure humanity. He was of a full habit, and in the month of July suffered a paralytic stroke of which it was believed in town for some time that he had died; but he lingered to the end of the year 1786, and then expired at Cork. He had been near forty years upon the stage, and was greatly admired in characters of either force or feeling. Mr. Digges had not excited any great attention while acting here under Mr. Colman, and consequently it was less a personal regard to him than an envy to Mrs. Siddons that moved those who used his name against her reputation.

Brereton's case was of a different nature, — he had greatly distinguished himself by acting here with her, and owed some valuable engagements to her preference. I know the deceiving nature of self-love, and how soon the auxiliary fancies that his principal could not exist without him. If a mind be quite sound, it will consider voluntary justice as a favour;[1] if it have a warp of vanity upon it, it will view even voluntary favour as a mere matter of justice. Now the voluntary favour intended Mr. Brereton was to take less from him than from any other performer for whom she acted. It might have been concluded that nothing was to be paid, — some complaint seems to have arisen

[1] See Mr. Tooke's dedication of his great work to the University of Cambridge.

from irritated feelings, which a dispassionate consideration of all the circumstances disavowed, perhaps regretted. The effects, very disagreeable in their course, will be the very first subject noticed in the winter season of 1784–85.

In the meantime it may be agreeable to turn from the storm preparing for one sister to the more cheering prospect which just now opened to the other. Miss Kemble, as Mr. Steevens truly said, "succeeded, at Colman's theatre, beyond the warmest expectations of her friends, in the very delicate part of Harriet, in 'The Guardian." I have formerly observed, with proper feeling, upon the harshness with which her Almeria and Alicia were treated at Drury Lane Theatre, while sustaining the very terrible comparison with the powers of her greater sister on the same evenings. But it does seem to need some particular explanation, how, yielding at once the palm of tragedy to Miss Woollery, she came to accept the part of Harriet, in "The Guardian," a comedy elegantly drawn by Garrick from the delightful "Pupille" (the ward), a petite piece by M. Fagan.

To this choice the very beautiful young actress was directed by the judgment — very probably by the passion — of the celebrated commentator on Shakespeare, who, with great admiration of her accomplishments, professed now the deepest concern for her interest. Everything here bears a relation to the hopes which he certainly enter-

tained; and, as he rehearsed with her the scenes between Heartly and Harriet, he flattered himself that the preference of the play might suggest a similar attachment of the pupil to the masterly and most insinuating instructor. Nor was the disparity greater as to the ages of the parties. Mr. Steevens was now in the forty-fourth year of his age, and possessed every advantage of mind, person, and fortune. When Hayley upon his monument inscribed these lines, those who remember the animation of his countenance will acquit him of posthumous flattery:

> "Peace to these ashes! once the bright attire
> Of Steevens, sparkling with ætherial fire."

A slight outline of the comedy will show that this illustration is not fanciful. Harriet, the ward of Heartly, is presumed by him to have fixed her affections upon a coxcomb of her own age; and although the young lady exhibits many palpable indications of a much graver choice, the almost paternal relation in which he stands to her, his maturity, and the inbred modesty of his character, remote from every tinct of personal vanity, repel from him the conception that she can possibly bestow her preference upon himself. The exquisite address of the French author enables him to parry the very plainest declarations that she can well make, and, in a scene of inimitable delicacy, she is driven to request him to write for her a letter

intended as a disclosure to himself. She even touches upon his tender care of her infancy. This, though by no means applying to the coxcomb Clackit, he considers as escaping her merely in her confusion, and, therefore, striking it out, closes the letter, and asks whether he shall send it. The answer is naïve even in English, — "Yes, if you think I ought to send it."

Perhaps few sounds were ever more agreeable to the ear of Steevens than those which the representative of Harriet uttered to her self-constituted guardian. But the male coquette probably never seriously sought a permanent engagement; and the prudence of the lady and her family soon broke off attentions equivocal in their object, and dangerous in their continuance. At no very distant period she gave her hand to Mr. Twiss, a gentleman of great merit,[1] and her son is the present member in Parliament for Wootton Basset.[2] I recollect that Steevens, for some years, used to support in silence the very intelligible

[1] All Shakespearians acknowledge themselves infinitely indebted to the persevering diligence of Mr. Twiss. He completed a task of the most irksome toil, — a Verbal Index to the works of Shakespeare. Every important word being exhibited in the classical mode, with all its recurrences, it becomes absolutely certain in what shades of meaning the great author indulged himself. Had this work existed from the time of Rowe, the rubbish of much early guessing at his sense would have been happily spared the present age. All our great early writers should have this indispensable conclusion to a careful reprint of their text.

[2] January, 1826.

looks of her brother, Mr. Kemble. There is a head of this lady by Sir Joshua Reynolds, an admirable likeness, which for unaffected simplicity, sweetness, and clearness of the pencil, is perhaps one of his finest portraits. Some seasons back it was exhibited, with a splendid selection from the works of that great master, in the British Gallery, Pall Mall. It was placed not far from his grand work, Mrs. Siddons in the Tragic Muse; and as much surpassed it in accurate resemblance as it fell below it in magnificence of design and execution. There is a fame even beyond this distinction, and that is the memory of an amiable and useful life.

The appearance of Mrs. Siddons at Drury Lane Theatre in the winter season of 1784–85 was happily preceded by the return of Mr. King to the exercise of his professional duties, which he was presumed to have relinquished for a plan of retirement. Like other veteran professors, he possessed an unbounded veneration for the ornaments of his earlier days; and, as he had some little poetical talent, he let his fancy loose among the precious recollections of the past, and did his best to imitate the following tender effusion, which Garrick, with so sure a taste, made the prologue to his, or rather Colman's, "Clandestine Marriage." Holland, be it observed, was the speaker:

"Oh, let me drop one tributary tear
On poor Jack Falstaff's grave and Juliet's bier!

You to their worth must testimony give;
'Tis in your hearts alone their fame can live.
Still as the scenes of life will shift away,
The strong impressions of their art decay.
Your children cannot feel what you have known;
They'll boast of Quins and Cibbers of their own."

The brilliant writer and unequalled actor were now to be remembered by an old friend, if not with equal power, by sincerity equally unquestionable, and Mr. King revived for a moment all he could revive, the name of departed genius. Nor was he a niggard as to existing excellence; but, with all the classical predilection of Milton, yet afforded his generous tribute of praise

"To what (though rare) of later age
Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage."

The terms "living worth" used by Mr. King, were, one might think, sufficiently general to pass unquestioned by the most attentive audience; but a sort of dull demur might be felt rather than heard, upon this expression; and, perhaps, the actor and his spectators understood each other perfectly, the one as sounding their good will afar off, and the other as showing that at present they bore no decided portion of it to the lady in whose favour the experiment was made. No man stood better, however, with the town than Mr. King; it is difficult to describe him on such occasions, — his vivacity had not what might be called hi-

larity about it; the smile seemed nearly banished from his expression; his effect was almost entirely in his utterance, which possessed an articulate velocity and smartness never heard but from him; and a collected confidence in himself that extorted an applause paid to the situation or the sentiment, rather than the man. Weston, Edwin, or Liston were antipodes to King. Give to either of these humourists the ghost of a character, they invested its thinness in corporeal substance, or, to choose another illustration, an outline of figure was all that was wanting to their art; they infused into it the richness of their own comic imagination in aid of irresistible features, and completed the work designed by another hand. But to their successors such men can leave only the outline they received, and the future spectators see only the ghost of what delighted their fathers.

To return to the immediate subject, — Mrs. Siddons's reappearance: while Mr. King thus expressed his managerial opinion of the "living worth" which had been so rudely questioned, her husband, under whose directions she might fairly be presumed to act, as every theatrical engagement could only be made by him or by his power, caused the following letter to be inserted in the principal London newspapers.

"The following is an answer to the scandalous stories lately circulated to the prejudice of Mrs. Siddons's private character:

"TO THE PRINTER.

"SIR: — I am unused to write for public inspection, but I will not hesitate to state the truth, and I think the generous and candid will excuse the rest. I therefore declare that Mrs. Siddons never wished, asked, nor accepted a single farthing from Mr. Digges; and that, a few days after his benefit, that gentleman acknowledged his obligations to her by a very polite note, which Mrs. Siddons (not expecting so malignant an attack) destroyed.

"With regard to Mr. Brereton, so far from refusing to perform for him, she agreed to do it for a much smaller sum than she was to receive from any other comedian, though every performer for whom she played gave her considerably less than the manager paid her nightly, for twenty nights together; but just as the benefits were commencing, she was taken ill, and confined to her bed nearly a fortnight. When she recovered, her strength would not permit her to perform immediately more than three nights a week, and, as the manager expected his engagement fulfilled, and was to leave Dublin at a particular time, she was obliged to forego the performing for Mr. Brereton. She after that made another attempt to serve him; why it failed, Mr. Brereton can truly tell; but, I will be bold to assert, without affording the smallest ground for any charge against Mrs. Siddons. These are solemn facts on which I leave the public to judge. Animadversions on her public performance and the questioning of her professional talents I shall ever submit to, feeling that those who so liberally reward her exertions have the best right to judge of their degree of merit, and to praise or censure them, as they think proper; but all attacks upon her private conduct that, if unnoticed, would deservedly lower her in the estimation of the public, and render her less worthy of their favour and kindness, I hold myself bound to answer.

"*Thursday, September 30.* W. SIDDONS."

The date, but that might be accident, is that of the day on which Mr. King made his compliments to her from the stage. The line of the actor almost required explanation itself, — the letter of her husband gave explanation enough as to Mr. Digges, but left much to be desired, to use a French formulary, as to Mr. Brereton. It is in truth such a one as might be expected from one unused to write for public inspection, — but the importance of the occasion seemed to call for an exertion of a different character. I think it very clear that her brother, Mr. Kemble, never saw it in manuscript. It did not hold her high enough — it wanted both force and point, it was gossiping and familiar; and there was something almost ludicrous in his declarations of "submitting to any animadversion on her public performance, and the questioning of her professional talents." Submission to an unavoidable tenure needs no declaration, and is accepted as no concession. That he holds himself bound to answer all attacks upon her private conduct is a position as little needed as the former; it was her professional conduct that was concerned in playing or not playing for two members of the profession.

That she took less from every actor for whom she played than the manager gave her for twenty nights together, and that Brereton was to be still higher favoured, or rated lower, was a miserable detail, and unfit for the public eye. The valuable

consideration for valuable aid we know must be had, but it is in all cases irksome both to give it and receive it publicly. The lawyer's fee is left happily with his clerk, the physician awkwardly waves for it as he retires, and turns away his face as he takes it. All that could be necessary was to give the mere fact of her illness and the confinement which it occasioned; the rest was misfortune, for which she had many ways of compensating Mr. Brereton.

But the worst symptom of the case was the churlishness of the letter which Mr. Brereton was at last induced to write:

"TO THE PRINTER OF THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER.

"Sunday, Oct. 3, 1784.

"SIR: — By inserting the following (which will of itself prove my authority) in your paper of to-morrow, you will very much oblige,

"Yours, etc.,

"WILLIAM SIDDONS."

"SIR: — I am concerned to find Mrs. Siddons has suffered in the public opinion on my account. I have told you before, and I again repeat it, that to the friends I have seen I have taken pains to exculpate her from the least unkindness to me in Dublin. I acknowledge she did agree to perform at my benefit for a less sum than for any other performer, but her illness prevented it; and that she would have played for me after that had not the night been appointed after she had played three times in the same week, — and that the week after her illness, — and I am

very willing you shall publish this letter, if you think it will be of the least service to Mrs. Siddons, to whom I am proud to own many obligations of friendship. I am, sir,

"Your very humble servant,

"W. Brereton.

"*To Mr. Siddons, Gower Street.*"

"Mr. Siddons cannot withhold his public thanks from Mr. Brereton for his obliging letter, and he has no doubt but that Mr. Digges will in a little time furnish Mrs. Siddons with another written testimony, that will entirely confound the artful schemes of her detractors."

With all this pride of obligation, did it become a generous man to be besieged upon such a subject? He alone could not be ignorant of the long altercation before the public, of which he was the cause. To explain to the friends he has seen was nothing, — the "pains to exculpate" should have filed along with the public attacks upon her. The inference in most minds was, that he had once angrily vented his disappointment in the language of censure, and had now seen reason to question his discretion or his justice. Like Eolus, himself, he had loosed a tempest which his desire could not still so easily as it was excited.

Mr. Siddons publicly expressed his thanks for this obliging letter. He might almost have exclaimed with King Lear:

> "This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
> On things would hurt me more."

During the very week after her illness (that illness which annulled her first attempt to serve him), she acted three times; and Mr. Brereton's night being unaccountably fixed in the same week, the second attempt was as impracticable as the former. Mr. Brereton was a first-rate actor of that day; how did it happen that he allowed his night to be so predicamented? Why was it accompanied with a condition that rendered it nugatory? The youngest branch of the Daggerwood family would not permit his benefit to be fixed on the second day of Epsom races.

It has occurred to me to witness the dreadful exertion of some performers in characters of the highest power. I have seen them stretched out and exhausted, and needing much time to restore their wasted strength and spirits. I, therefore, can feel no surprise when a lady, recent from a sick-chamber, is unable to act more than three times in one week. I continued, indeed, to think the profession laborious, until a great actor of our own times undertook to act Hamlet or Harlequin, I forget which, possibly both, twice on the same day for a week, perhaps weeks together.

The letter of Mr. Brereton had certainly done no good. It wanted warmth; there was latent bile about it; a child might discern that the parties were not upon the same friendly footing as they had once been. He had formerly made sure of being carried along with her as the favourite hero

in tragedy; but her brother was now in the theatre, and the powerful influence of both united to secure for Mr. Kemble every part which he could be ambitious to play. Venice might be preserved, but Jaffier was lost for ever.

The reader will find yet another letter from this gentleman; but, like the shades that were shown to the eye of Macbeth, but which "grieved his heart," the "second was like the former;" and by the way of explanation asserted, in general terms only, what the letter which had not been clearly understood exhibited even in detail.

"TO THE PRINTER OF THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER.

"SIR: — Having been informed that the letter signed by me in the several morning papers of yesterday, respecting Mrs. Siddons's conduct to me while in Ireland, has not been so clearly understood as it was both the intention on my part and justice to her that it should, I think it necessary again to repeat that it was in no respect owing to Mrs. Siddons that I had no benefit in Ireland; but, on the contrary, that in the course of a long and dangerous illness I received proofs of friendship from her which I shall ever recollect with gratitude, and avow now with sincere satisfaction. W. BRERETON.

"*October 5, 1784.*"

I know nothing so severely mortifying in life as this condition of an actor's profession, that he has occasionally to meet an audience prepared to revile or insult him, perhaps endanger his very existence; and that the almost awful respect paid

to his genius at one time is, for something or for nothing, thrown to the passing winds, and he is assailed like the vilest of mankind. Something more liberal, at all events more dignified, might be looked for from the visitors of a theatre royal; but touch any of the passions strongly, and all are mob alike. A feeling mind cannot avoid considering the mortification which must have depressed the great mistress of our affections, as she got into her carriage to proceed to the theatre on the afternoon of the 5th of October. She would be reminded, *mutatis mutandis*, of the pathetic remonstrance of Shakespeare's inimitable Richard the Second, addressed to the ungentle Northumberland:

> "Must I do so? and must I ravel out
> My weav'd up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
> If thy offences were upon record,
> Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,
> To read a lecture of them?"

Her choice of Mrs. Beverley for the occasion gave her brother, Mr. Kemble, an opportunity of leading her before the audience; so that when the curtain rose they advanced together. There was an advantage even in the simple attire of Mrs. Beverley; the robe and the tiara of the heroine would have seemed braving or farcical before a people who disdained to govern their roaring throats, and grumbled everything but pity.

At this time, in the full vigour of youth, I dined in the neighbourhood, and made a point of obtaining my favourite position in the pit. I was too near her to have any other feelings than those of respect for the grave composure and unaffected dignity of her manner, only yielding at intervals to the grateful acknowledgment of that applause which tried to drown the clamours of her enemies.

Mr. Kemble had long been studied in these popular exhibitions, and, finding that for the present nothing was likely to be done, he wisely concluded that her absence was most likely to decide the house in her favour; and, repeating their respects in the usual manner, he led her off the stage, and left her noisy assailants to consider. After some interval, the calls for her became less mixed with opposition than before, and she came again on the stage, but alone; and deliberately advancing to the very front, with all the self-possession of truth, and the inimitable grace which always attended her, thus addressed the audience:

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: — The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I in the slightest degree conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies. When they shall be proved to be true my aspersers will be justified; but, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult."

It was not very usual to hear a lady on such occasions; the delicacy of the sex, while it becomes accustomed to repeat the sentiments of others, shrinks from the seeming boldness of publicly uttering their own. But there was a male dignity in the understanding of Mrs. Siddons that raised her above the helpless timidity of other women; and it was certainly without surprise, and evidently with profound admiration, that they heard this noble being assert her innocence and demand protection.

> "Intestine war no more our passions wage,
> And giddy factions hear away their rage."

The extensive view I am taking of the professional course of this great woman offers various points to my selection, and we can rarely judge with entire accuracy of the feelings of others; but, if I were to mark the moment which I should think she most frequently revolved, as affording her the greatest satisfaction, the fortitude of this night, and its enthusiastic reception by all who heard and saw it, seem most worthily to claim so happy a distinction.

But the firmness that sustained her while before the audience, a little failed her when she retired to her dressing-room. To afford the agitated nerves a short season for composure, Mr. King, the manager, now requested a few minutes' indulgence; and the necessity to become somebody

else soon restored her to herself. The attack upon her was quelled by her seasonable resolution, and poor Digges soon completed the evidence of its injustice, as well as cruelty, by making his son write for him "that he had paid to Mrs. Siddons no money whatever, and had written a letter expressing his obligation to her; that, as he understood it had been mislaid, he with great pleasure repeated his acknowledgments."

The more I reflect upon this affair, the more astonished I am that Brereton, who acted Lewson this very evening in the play, neither came voluntarily forward, nor was called for, to my remembrance, by the audience. If his letter was deemed unsatisfactory, and he knew that what he intended to amend it could not appear till the day following, when he heard a shower of revilings whistling about the head of a lady to whom he was so proud to profess his obligations, what so natural, so manly, or so proper, as to step forward with frankness and spirit, and assure the people, from authority that could not be questioned, "that he had never sanctioned, by a murmur, the calumny of which he was the subject; that no attempts, if such could be made, would ever induce him to palter in any declaration called for by the public; that Mrs. Siddons had done all, and more than he had any right to look for, and that this would always be his feeling with respect to her?"

For some time after, annoyance constantly attended her coming upon the stage. She used to acknowledge by a reverence the applause by which it was overborne, and go on steadily with the character; but it flattened her manner for a few evenings. Before the subject of provincial benefits is quite dropped, I confess I somewhat doubt the propriety of an opinion formerly delivered by me, and think more favourably of the right of leading actors to the aid of such stars as occupy the public attention strongly. When such a prodigy, for instance, as Mrs. Siddons has been acting for twenty nights anywhere, what chance is there that a profitable house can be obtained without her? Besides, if such aid be of vital importance to him who is assisted, it should not be forgotten that it is one source of profit also to the great actress herself. Some cases will now and then arise which properly claim a service perfectly disinterested. They afford a consolation which can never be weakened, in whatever circumstances we may be placed.

> "One self-approving hour whole years outweighs
> Of stupid starers and of loud huzzas."

It was on the 3d of November that Mrs. Siddons added to her impression the full display of regal majesty, by the performance of Margaret of Anjou in the tragedy of "The Earl of Warwick." This play was an imitation, without ac-

knowledgment, by Dr. Thomas Franklin, of the much-admired "Comte de Warwick" of Laharpe. The French author had the mortification to see the tender interest in his piece frittered away, and a figurative invasion upon his style, which he piqued himself upon keeping pure and natural. The metaphoric mode of the English play he ascribes to the English taste; that the figures are sometimes low and trivial he properly imputes to Franklin himself.

Succeeding Mrs. Yates in the character of the queen of our sixth Henry, I should conceive, from the boldness of her style, that Mrs. Siddons still more resembled Dumesnil, the heroine of Laharpe, in 1763, — to whom the grateful author paid an elegant tribute, which closed with these four lines:

"Poursuis; et règne encor sur la scène ennoblie;
Elle assure à ton nom un éclat éternel.
Il n'est rien de sublime, il n'est rien d'immortel
Que la nature et le génie."

Mrs. Siddons had unluckily fallen upon an age too cold or weak to pay her such a compliment, however great were her exertions. During the period of my personal observation the stage has possessed nothing of an original or highly poetic character. At the time I am writing, the same unacknowledged plunder of the French stage is going on as is stigmatised above in the year 1766.

We are not in the condition of men whose ancestors are unknown, — our dramatic forefathers are immortal; but their descendants die either smothered in the birth or never attaining maturity.

"The Earl of Warwick" is now remembered only by schoolboys, for its long-sword fencing match in the scene between Edward and Warwick, which has often alarmed the visitors of the spouting seminaries about town. This is no bad specimen of that pointed and, perhaps, Gothic taste which, however condemned as artificial, suits the temper of an English audience. Smart altercation seem to keep the interest alive, for the tender emotions are all languid when protracted.

It is amusing to hear the young Frenchman, Laharpe, echoing the fierce spirit of the North. Scotland somewhat elevates the tone of the Gallic Muse.

"Et du haut de ses monts, contre un joug qui l'offense,
Lutte et défend encor sa fière indépendance."

The next choice made for Mrs. Siddons was also from the French school, the character of Zara in the play of that name. This was the initiatory part of her tender predecessor, Mrs. Cibber, — an actress with whom, if our fathers can be credited, Mrs. Siddons might be compared, at least for the early part of her course. When the enlargement of her figure and the strength of her features disinclined her to the youthful

heroine, she showed that she could be Pritchard as well as Cibber, and astonish the minds by her force which she had subdued by her softness.

But the effects produced on the first appearance of Hill's "Zara" at Drury Lane Theatre in 1736 could not revive again. Mrs. Siddons performed Zara on two following Wednesdays, and certainly exerted herself greatly; but Voltaire, however deeply he had felt the passion of Shakespeare's "Othello," was little disposed to borrow any of the bustle of that play; and the modern audiences at least thought "Zara" cold and declamatory. It may be as well to observe, too, that Milward at first, and Garrick afterward, had made very powerful effect in the part of Lusignan; the secret how to do so appears to have expired with them. I once saw Henderson try it, and I suppose as closely as he could bring himself to Garrick; but he was not regal, and barely venerable. He had that within which could not impress his exterior.

On the 2d of December, Cumberland's tragedy of "The Carmelite," in The Lady of St. Vallori, afforded our heroine a new and even a powerful character, but not strongly diversified from some other parts which she was in the habit of acting, and lining almost exactly with Lady Randolph in "Douglas." Mrs Siddons acted with great dignity and pathos, but subjected herself to the wonderful acumen of a critic, who thus expressed

himself: "She exerted herself greatly, but gave no new specimens of her art. The most interesting situations of the play are similar to those in 'Isabella' and 'Douglas,' where she has already been seen; and she is too guarded and methodical in her manner of performance to colour the same subject in different styles."

This I consider to be the highest compliment that malice or folly ever paid, when it meant to decry. Where the same situations recur in the subject, and no discriminations of character are afforded by the author, the styles of performance cannot be different when the original manner was drawn from actual nature; because this would be a gross error in philosophy, where the effects should be different, the causes remaining exactly the same. But nothing can be more unfounded than the remark. The character, though in its leading features, the passion of the scene and the relations of life, going parallel with others, is discriminated much by manners, and something by object. She breeds up Montgomeri to avenge his father; the principle of chivalry is strong in this drama. It has the gloom which seems to hover over Norman castles, — their impenetrable secrecy, their murky terrors. The Lady of St. Vallori is also deeply coloured by the piety, or, as I suppose I must term it, the superstition of her times. You see nothing of this in "Douglas," though accurately it should have been there. Authors often

forget the world before the Reformation. One might think they had a descendant of Knox for the licenser of the North, so utterly divested is Home's play of everything Catholic.

I therefore hazard little in affirming that so far was either her caution or her method from imposing sameness upon the great genius of the stage that the fable, and not the actress, alone recalled the characters compared with the Lady of St. Vallori. The catastrophes, however, essentially differ; and in "The Carmelite" moral and poetical justice are the same. The husband returns to happiness; the son does not perish; and the hideous Hildebrand alone presses the green floorcloth of dramatic expiation. But happiness and tragedy seldom will unite, and the great efficacy of the stage is the tear for expiring virtue.

Mr. Kemble, in the early part of his life, was much devoted to the writings of that mild and moral poet, Massinger. The purity of his style, and his peculiar eloquence, seem to have first excited his attention; and, for the purposes of the lecturer, I know no dramatic author who affords more perfect matter for selection. He considered "The Maid of Honour" to be worthy of the talents of Mrs. Siddons; and, but that the interest of the piece was restricted entirely to calculated and balanced affection, and the most imperious of the passions submitted to the discipline of an affected honour, there is matter demanding such

an artist, though to a mixed audience the whole play may seem brilliant only

> "With the moonshine's watery beams."

Camiola is, in the opinion of Doctor Ireland, a character of infinite value. "Everywhere she animates us with her spirit, and instructs us with her sense. Yet this superiority takes nothing from her softer feelings. Her tears flow with a mingled fondness and regret, and she is swayed by a passion which is only quelled by her greater resolution."

The grossness of the author's age has tainted her reproof to Fulgentio with a little too much muscular preference in the person of a lover. I dare only touch upon the lighter requisites, of complexion, and so on:

> "Give me the lovely brown,
> A thick curl'd hair of the same die, broad shoulders,
> A brawny arm full of veins, a leg without
> An artificial calf."

She is sometimes coarse even to a proverb:

> "Rich you are,
> Devilish rich, as 'tis reported, and sure have
> The aids of Satan's little fiends to get it;
> And what is got upon his back, must be
> Spent you know where — the proverb's stale."

But Kemble knew well what to do with stuff like this. And the inimitable actress knew equally well how to improve and sharpen points of a finer

temper. In the fourth scene in the fourth act there were some transcendent touches of this kind. To the king, upon an unworthy accusation which had escaped him:

> "*Cam.* With your leave, I must not kneel, Sir,
> When I reply to this; but thus rise up
> In my defence, tell you, as a man," etc.

Again, at a short distance, where the thoughts approach the magnificence of Shakespeare himself:

> "But, be no more a king,
> Unless you do me right. Burn your decrees,
> And of your laws and statutes make a fire,
> To thaw the frozen numbness of delinquents,
> If he escape unpunish'd."

But how preserve the noble grace with which she turned upon the duchess, her rival, who insulted her with "self-comparison?"

> "*Aurel.* Yes; the object,
> Look on it better, lady, may excuse
> The change of his affection.
> *Cam.* The object!
> In what? — forgive me, modesty, if I say
> You look upon your form in the false glass
> Of flattery and self-love, and that deceives you."[1]

[1] A young writer should be made to observe the beauty of the expression, "forgive me, modesty," where it occurs. It was so at hand to use the term of cold respect, Madam, when addressing Aurelia. She has, however, then a higher appeal. The reverse of sentiment brings it out lower down, with a quiet sinking of the spirits, — "No, Madam, I recant."

But she is too unhappy to sustain this important tone, and the following check was delivered with a truth that thrilled to the very soul:

> "*Cam.* Down, proud heart!
> Why do I rise up in defence of that
> Which in my cherishing of it hath undone me?
> No, Madam, I recant — you are all beauty,
> Goodness, and virtue; and poor I not worthy
> As a foil to set you off.
> But though to all men else I did appear
> The shame and scorn of women, he stands bound
> To hold me as the masterpiece."

I must, however, bid farewell to "The Maid of Honour," who certainly never had a more fascinating representative. I allow myself but one more literary illustration, excited by the following remark of Doctor Ireland: "If the reader will compare the speech of Paulo with the Penseroso, he cannot fail to remark a similarity in the cadences, as well as in the measure and the solemnity of the thoughts." Nothing can be more ingenious than this observation. It is, however, much strengthened by finding the expression, which in Milton's "Comus" startled some of his commentators, "She fables not," in this very play of "The Maid of Honour," which appeared in print in 1632, and so preceded, by two years, the masque at Ludlow Castle.

> "*Camiola.* I fable not." — Act ii. Sc. 2.

CHAPTER III.

IT has been said that, since the "Eumenides" of Æschylus, tragic poetry had produced nothing so terrible and sublime as the "Macbeth" of Shakespeare. It may be said with equal probability that, since the happy invention of man invested dramatic fiction with seeming reality, nothing superior, perhaps equal, to the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Siddons, has been seen.

She had experienced much of the illiberality of criticism, to which it seems not to have suited her temper or taste through life to pay any court. The distributors of daily and monthly fame had not scrupled to assert that the sagacious actress, conscious of the limits of her powers, had wisely avoided the boundless demands of Shakespeare, and devoted herself to the tender effusions of inferior spirits; that a melodious flow of declamation was a happiness but of the ear; a majestic person, and an expressive as well as beautiful countenance, accidental advantages of nature; but that the burst of passion, the bold inspiration of positive genius, superior to all precedent, and tram-

mel, and tuition, of these gifts she had positively nothing, and was of a temperament too cold and systematic ever to suspect even the want of them.

To use the language of the late Doctor Parr when speaking of Warburton, on the 2d of February, 1785, "from her towering and distant heights she rushed down upon her prey, and, disdaining the ostentatious prodigalities of cruelty, destroyed it at a blow." She acted Lady Macbeth on that night, and criticism, and envy, and rivalry, sunk at once before her. The subject was as fortunate to her as to the great poet himself, and from that hour her dominion over the passions was undisputed, her genius pronounced to be at least equal to her art, and Sir Joshua's happy thought of identifying her person with the Muse of Tragedy confirmed by the immutable decree of the public.

The reader or spectator of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is not inquisitive as to his real history, and would not be a little surprised were it laid before him. The gracious Duncan, too, besieging Durham without success, is said, soon after his return, to have been slain by his people, thus closing a rather inglorious reign of only six years. The death, on which his immortality was built, is assigned by the celebrated "Chronicon Elegiacum."

But astonishment will succeed surprise, for the reader is next to learn that the epithet "gracious" is quite as applicable to Macbeth himself as to Duncan; and the "historic doubts" as to Richard

the Third may be revived, on perhaps surer ground, in relation to the actual qualities of the usurper of Scotland. "He seems," says a learned inquirer, "to have been an able and beneficent prince. The 'Chronicon Elegiacum' represents fertile seasons as attendants of his reign, which Winton confirms. If a king makes fertile seasons it must be by promoting agriculture, and diffusing among his people the blessings of peace. Had he paid more attention to his own interests, and less to those of his subjects, the crown might have remained in his family. But, neglecting the practice of war, he fell a martyr to his own virtues." [1]

But, if he was really guilty of the murder of Duncan, he took at least the usual road of expiation, for he certainly made a pilgrimage to Rome in the papacy of Leo the Ninth.

"All this tyme was gret plenté,
Habundande bathe on lande and se:
He was in justice richt lauchful,
And til his legis al awfulle.
Quhen Pape was Leo the Nynt in Rome,
As pilgryme to the court he come;
And in his alms he sew silver
Til al pur folk, that had myster.
In al time oysit he to wyrk
Profetabilly for haly kirk."

— *Winton*, vi. 29.

[1] See Mr. Pinkerton's "Enquiry," Vol. ii. p. 197.

It was to gratify Malcolm III. and his descendants that he was represented, like Caliban, to be the son of a devil, and connected with witches. Happily for us, Shakespeare, as to these often-compared tyrants, Richard and Macbeth, was acquainted only with the histories written under the patronage of their enemies. Macbeth was supplanted at last by a foreign force, and reigned in great tranquillity seventeen years.

Particulars so curious and so little known I would not suppress. They suggest to my mind one important reflection. In the play of "Macbeth" the hurry which presses on the events of his life, from his coronation to his death, allows the poet little time to dilate upon the particular disposition of such a man; yet I cannot but think that, had he known of this pious excursion, he would have made fine use of it in the gloomy reveries of Macbeth, have shown him struggling between the efficacy of religious ceremony and magical illusion, and that it would have supplied some dreadful images to the perturbed slumbers of his more fiendlike wife.

The first scene of Lady Macbeth is decisive of the whole character. She lets out, in a few lines, the daring steadiness of her mind, which could be disturbed by no scruple, intimidated by no danger. The occasion does not change the nature here as it does in her husband. There is no struggle after any virtue to be resigned. She is as thoroughly prepared in one moment, as if visions of

greatness had long informed her slumbers, and she had awaked to meditate upon every means, however dreadful, that could secure her object.

When Mrs. Siddons came on with the letter from Macbeth (the first time we saw her), such was the impression from her form, her face, her deportment, — the distinction of sex was only external, — "her spirits" informed their tenement with the apathy of a demon. The commencement of this letter is left to the reader's imagination. "They met me in the day of success," shows that he had previously mentioned the witches. Her first novelty was a little suspension of the voice, "they made themselves — air:" that is, less astonished at it as a miracle of nature, than attentive to it as a manifestation of the reliance to be built upon their assurances. She read the whole letter with the greatest skill, and, after an instant of reflection, exclaimed:

> "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor — and shalt be
> What thou art promised."

The amazing burst of energy upon the words "shalt be," perfectly electrified the house. The determination seemed as uncontrollable as fate itself. The searching analysis of Macbeth which she makes, was full of meaning, — the eye and the hand confirmed the logic. Ambition is the soul of her very phrase, —

> "Thou'dst have, great Glamis."

Great Glamis! this of her husband! metaphysical speculation, calculated estimate, — as if it had regarded Cæsar or Pompey. He is among the means before me, — how is such a nature to be worked up to such unholy objects?

"Hie thee hither," says the impatience, which longs to begin its strife with the antagonist virtue "Hie thee hither," —

> "That I may pour *my* spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue," etc.

But a different style of beauty was called forth by the hasty entrance of a servant to announce the coming of the king that night into the very meshes she is about to spread for his destruction, Shakespeare, alone, perhaps, would have written the daring compromise of all decorum which bursts from the exulting savage upon this intelligence, —

> "Thou'rt mad to say it."

Aware of the inference to be drawn from an earnestness so marked, he immediately cloaks the passion with a reason why the intelligence could not seem true. The actress, fully understanding the process, after the violence of the exclamation, recovered herself with slight alarm, and in a lowered tone proposed a question suited to the new feeling:

> "Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,
> Would have inform'd for preparation."

The murmured mysteriousness of the address to the spirits "that tend on mortal thoughts" became stronger as she proceeded:

> "Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers."

A beautiful thought, be it observed; as if these sources of infant nourishment could not even consent to mature destruction without some loathsome change in the very stream itself which flowed from them.

When the actress, invoking the destroying ministers, came to the passage, —

> "Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief," —

the elevation of her brows, the full orbs of sight, the raised shoulders, and the hollowed hands, seemed all to endeavour to explore what yet were pronounced no possible objects of vision. Till then, I am quite sure, a figure so terrible had never bent over the pit of a theatre, that night crowded with intelligence and beauty in its seven front rows.

The salutation of Macbeth, — the remark upon the abstraction on his countenance which follows her brief intimation of all that is to be done, — all claimed notice.

> "O never
> Shall sun that morrow see."

Macbeth himself (Smith) sunk under her at once, and she quitted the scene with an effect which cannot be described; in short, the triumph of nature, rightly interpreted by the greatest writer and greatest actress that had ever laboured for the delight and instruction of mankind.

The following scene is the beautiful reception of Duncan at Inverness. The honoured hostess received his Majesty with all the exterior of profound obligation. She was too pure an actress to allow a glance of triumph to stray toward the spectators.

Macbeth, conscious of his design, is even neglectful of his duty as a host; he is absent from the royal banquet, and his absence provokes inquiry. His lady, bending steadily to her purpose, is equal to all occasions, and now breaks in upon her husband's fearful rumination. He had determined to proceed no further in the business, and she has again to revive the unholy flame which gratitude had quenched. She assails him with sophistry and contempt and female resolution, seemingly superior to all manly daring. She quotes his own bolder against his present self, and urges the infamy of receding from so proud a design. Filled from the crown to the toe with direst cruelty, the horror of the following sentence seemed bearable from its fitness to such a being. But I yet wonder at the energy of both utterance and action with which it was accompanied:

"I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this."

There was no qualifying with our humanity in the tone or gesture. This really beautiful and interesting actress did not at all shrink from standing before us the true and perfect image of the greatest of all natural and moral depravations, — a fiendlike woman.

The scene after the murder exhibits Lady Macbeth as bold in action as she had, during speculation, asserted herself to be. "Give *me* the daggers," excited a general start from those around me. Upon her return from the chamber of slaughter, after gilding the faces of the grooms, from the peculiar character of her lip she gave an expression of contempt more striking than any she had hitherto displayed.

From the third scene of the second act Lady Macbeth has long been banished, so that we had no opportunity of seeing how the highly wrought agonies of Macbeth would have stood contrasted by the delicate affectation of his wife. But the natural exclamation of Macduff, —

"O Banquo! Banquo!
Our royal master's murder'd," —

excites one from Lady Macbeth which I should like, I confess, to have heard from Mrs. Siddons:

"Woe, alas! what! in our house?"

"This," says Warburton, "is very fine. Had she been innocent, nothing but the murder itself, and not any of its aggravating circumstances, would naturally have affected her. As it was, her business was to appear highly disordered at the news. Therefore, like one who has her thoughts about her, she seeks for an aggravating circumstance that might be supposed most to affect her personally, not considering that by placing it there she discovered rather a concern for herself than for the king. On the contrary, her husband, who had repented the act, and was now labouring under the horrors of a recent murder, in his exclamation gives all the marks of sorrow for the fact itself."

The introduction of Lady Macbeth in this scene must depend entirely upon the credit which the actress has with the audience. Coarse hypocrisy excites derision. Garrick would not trust Mrs. Pritchard with either the astonishment or the seeming swoon. Macklin thought Mrs. Porter alone could have been endured by the audience. I feel equally confident with regard to Mrs. Siddons. There Lady Macbeth ought most assuredly to be. She is the last of human beings to have absented herself on such an occasion as a night alarm, because her absence could not fairly be accounted for, in the first place; and, in the second, she had fully prepared her mind to act what she thought the occasion demanded. The upper gal-

lery should never be the guide where a manager is himself worthy of Shakespeare. What he shows may always be shown; the temperaments of person and manner are all that the manager is to take care of. Liston in the Fool certainly could not be trusted by the side of King Lear, but Farren might. The dryness of the one actor would add to the effect of Lear's madness; the irresistible countenance of the other would confound all sensibility in immoderate laughter.

By the second scene of the third act, we find that the possession of his object had rendered Macbeth moody and solitary. Their attention while apart seems to have been directed to the same object; for his queen, on her entrance, immediately inquires whether Banquo be gone from court? She is ready to suggest the murder of that nobleman and his son. "In them nature's copy's not eterne." But she soon learns the mistake of the adage, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.* The first crime in Macbeth had the greatest extent. He has no prelude of insect destruction, like Domitian. For his own good "all causes" must give way. He would not leave a virtue alive. She recommends him to be bright and jovial among his guests that night at the banquet. To which scene we hasten to look at the manner of our great actress. "Mrs. Pritchard," says Davies, "showed consummate art in endeavouring to hide Macbeth's frenzy from the observation of his

guests, by drawing their attention to conviviality. She smiled on one, whispered to another, and distantly saluted a third; in short, she practised every possible artifice to hide the transaction that passed between her husband and the vision his disturbed imagination had raised. Her reproving and angry looks, which glanced toward Macbeth, at the same time were mixed with marks of inward vexation and uneasiness."

I should think Mr. Davies, from his minuteness of observation, must have figured there as one of the nobles, only a few covers from the royal state. But the truth is, a great deal of this is impossible, — there has been no time for it: the lords observe as soon as anything occurs to excite attention, as the text shows us:

"*Macb.* The table's full.
Len. Here is a place reserv'd, Sir.
Macb. Where?
Len. Here, my good lord. What is't that moves your highness?
Macb. Which of you have done this?
Lords. What, my good lord!"

On Roşse's calling upon them to rise, his Highness not being well, Lady Macbeth desires them to keep their seats, — explains his malady, which notice only augments; begs them to feed, and regard him not; and then coming down to Macbeth, endeavours to baffle his terrors. Davies closes the eulogium thus: "When, at last, as if

unable to support her feelings any longer, she rose from her seat, and, with a half-whisper of terror, said, "Are you a man?" she assumed a look of anger, indignation, and contempt, not to be surpassed."

This is very far from being clearly put; a half-whisper of terror, attended by a look of anger, indignation, and contempt, is a rather singular mode of encouraging dismay. The whisper is for concealment of what is said from others; but the words whispered are a reproach, and something more, incompatible with terror. She is so much mistress of herself as even to assail him with ridicule. His conviction is "proper stuff," the "painting of fear," the "air-drawn dagger" "which, he said, led him to Duncan." Such flaws and starts as became only a story told by a woman at a winter's fire, under the wise authority of a grandam. "When all's done, he look'd but on a stool." But so it is, without perfect recollection of the scenes, praise is drawn from the imagination rather than the fact, and much is imputed which was never done by the actress; and, if it had been done, would have merited no commendation.

The greater beauties of Mrs. Siddons's manner were to be found, I think, in the —

> "Think of this, good peers,
> But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other;
> Only it spoils the pleasure of the time."

And the rapidly cutting down the question from Rosse, — "What sights, my lord?"

"*Lady M.* I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse;
Question enrages him: at once good night:
Stand not upon the order of your going,
But go at once."

The address displayed here drew down a thunder of applause.

The task of Lady Macbeth is here finished; as the great tempter she has done her office, and her husband must now defend, by military skill and bravery, the crown which his crimes have acquired and hazarded. But Shakespeare has one more terrible lesson to give; namely, to show that, when the force of volition is withdrawn, the fancy becomes a dreadful victim to the images of past guilt; and she who waking can dispel her husband's terrors and her own, in sleep beholds her bleeding victims for ever present, and the circumstances of their fate passing continually in their original order.[1]

[1] Schlegel just touches upon this scene, with a high compliment to the poet: "Shakespeare est peut-être le seul poète qui caractérise les maladies de l'âme, la melancholie, la folie, le somnambulise, avec une parfaite vérité; elle est telle qu'un médecin pourrait s'instruire à cette école." — *Cours de Littérat. Dram.* Vol. ii. p. 379.

I prefer the French translation for two reasons, — because it is that by which alone the author consents to be judged; and

In the performance of this scene, Mrs. Siddons differed essentially from every other actress. I will explain myself. The actresses previous to herself seemed to consider such a perturbation as not possessing full power upon the frame; they, therefore, rather glided than walked, and every other action had a feebler character than is exhibited by one awake. Their figure, too, was kept perpendicularly erect, and the eye, though open, studiously avoided motion.

But the theory of somnambulism is somewhat at variance with the stage exhibition; and if the doctor of physic who attends upon Lady Macbeth had been very profound in his art, he would have considered the eyes being open as the most extraordinary part of the scene before him. The cases quoted in our books all state the sleep-walker to have his eyes closed. It is only when any object of his fancy has been removed from its expected place that the eyes are feebly unclosed, as if to find the position of it, and are immediately shut, to leave the fancy to control entirely its own operations. It has been observed that the iris on such occasions appears fixed, and the eye dim.

Mrs. Siddons seemed to conceive the fancy as having equal power over the whole frame, and all

that there is a hardness in the English translation, and, from keeping too literally to the German arrangement, an obscurity as to the meaning, which is never observable in its Gallic rival.

her actions had the wakeful vigour; she laded the water from the imaginary ewer over her hands, bent her body to listen to the sounds presented by her fancy, and hurried to resume the taper where she had left it, that she might with all speed drag her pallid husband to their chamber. The excellent Dugald Stewart thinks that "in the somnambuli, the mind retains its power over the limbs, but possesses scarcely any over the body, excepting those particular members of it which are employed in walking." [1] A larger reign must be allowed to the fancy, however, if the actions of gathering and eating grapes, or climbing trees, or composing exercises for the school, can be performed, "yet all this while in a most fast sleep."

Although the general effect of Mrs. Siddons was what I have stated, one idle cavil crept out against her manner in this noble scene. People cant about originality, and yet dote upon precedent. "When she sets down the candle, who does not perceive she varies from her predecessors, only that her hands may be more at liberty to imitate the process of ablution?" That her hands are more at liberty for all purposes by setting down the light will be readily conceded; but here the waking process must be followed, and who, bearing a taper from one apartment to another, does not set it upon a table when the

[1] "Elem. of the Philos. of Mind," p. 347, ed. 1802.

room contains one? Who about to wash the hands retains anything in them? The critic was too purblind to perceive that the real trick was in retaining the light to show unconsciousness of what the sleeper was doing, whereas all the habits of life are by the somnambulist done mechanically.

The quantity of white drapery in which the actress was enveloped had a singular and striking effect; her person, more truly than that of Pierre, might be said to be "lovelily dreadful," but extremely majestic both in form and motion, — it was, however, the majesty of the tomb; or, as Shakespeare in a previous scene expresses it, —

> "As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
> To countenance this horror."

Perhaps her friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, might have suggested the almost shroud-like clothing of this important scene. I saw him on this occasion in the orchestra, with great pleasure, sitting "all gaze, all wonder." She was in truth so strongly articulate that I have no doubt he heard every syllable that breath made up, for she hardly allowed the voice any portion of its power.

There is a mezzotinto print in existence of Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in the scene after the murder of Duncan. The ridiculous (not because inaccurate, but because unpicturesque) costume of Garrick does all that dress can do to defeat

the startling terrors of his countenance; but the queen is a kind of angry Hecate, rather than Lady Macbeth, and, however terrible, was much lower in the scale of being than her sublime successor. It is difficult to imagine how such a consummate artist as Garrick could play Gloucester, Richard the Third, who lived in the year 1480, in what is called a shape, and yet act Macbeth, who I think murdered Duncan four hundred and forty years earlier, in a general's uniform of the reign of George the Second. However, the fact is unquestionable, and he so acted it all his life.

I will not, at this distance from the performance, endeavour to describe the Macbeth of Smith. In its outline I suppose him to have given what he remembered of Garrick; he walked the character, but, though much in earnest, he never looked it. The perpetual strain upon his features reminds me of an absurd reading in this very part; and the multitudinous passions, in his expression of them, at the wafting of his hand, became incarnadine, or, as Murphy would say, one red. How so sensible a man as Smith certainly was could endure the heavy monotony of his tragic utterance, with all the variety of nature by his side, would surprise, if any self-delusion could surprise, one acquainted with human nature. A great actor, who spoke in a key much higher than any performer existing who speaks at all, told me once seriously that his voice was a deep bass.

With one comprehensive remark of the learned German author whom I have already quoted I shall close all that Macbeth has suggested to me. "Rien n'est comparable à la puissance de ce tableau pour exciter la terreur. On frissonne en se rappelant le meurtre de Duncan, le simulacre de poignard qui voltige devant les yeux de Macbeth, l'apparition de Banco pendant le repas, l'arrivée nocturne de Lady Macbeth endormie. De pareilles scènes sont uniques. Shakespeare seul en a pu conçevoir l'idée, et si elles se présentaient plus souvent sur la scène, il faudrait mettre la tête de Méduse au nombre des attributs de la muse tragique."

"In the excitement to terror this picture cannot be equalled. We shudder in recalling the murder of Duncan; the air-drawn dagger which waves before the eyes of Macbeth; the appearance of Banquo at the feast; the night progress of the sleeping queen. Such scenes stand alone. Shakespeare only can imagine such things, and were they oftener presented on the stage we must place the head of Medusa among the attributes of the tragic muse."

Their Majesties, in conformity with the gracious design of seeing every performance of Mrs. Siddons, commanded a repetition of "Macbeth" on the seventh of the same month. Tragedy, perhaps, suffers as much as comedy gains by the proximity of royal personages. In sitting to a

tragedy they weaken the effect by necessarily dividing the attention of the spectators; their silent admiration inspires nothing to others; but in comedy the royal enjoyment gives a fashion to laughter; the actor does not spare his efforts in the presence of royal patrons, and I believe the late king has led some of the loudest applause that was ever heard in a theatre.

The audiences of this period were sufficiently decorous to be trusted with a scenic display of regal assassination. His Majesty's government reposed upon the revenue improvement of the Great Minister, and nothing stirred in town but the Westminster scrutiny, which in eight months absolutely struck off 105 bad votes from the poll of Mr. Fox, and eighty-seven from that of Sir Cecil Wray. This gave a reasonable prospect that the whole of the votes might be examined thoroughly and decided fairly in the short compass of two years, the gentlemen of the bar receiving no unusual portion of subtlety, or its synonym, fees. Some little feeling for the unrepresented condition of Westminster warmed our galleries, even in the theatre, at this time; but a speech of Mr. Dundas in the House of Commons, covering Mr. Pitt from a personal attack by Mr. Fox, alone merited the notice of all times.

The character of Lady Macbeth became a sort of exclusive possession to Mrs. Siddons. There was a mystery about it which she alone seemed to

have penetrated. Future and not distant times might supply a better Macbeth. The ingenuity of decoration might add greater truth and reality to the scene, and the choruses might be rendered yet more overpowering by singers more exact and a band more numerous. All this we shall see done. Did it shake at all the supremacy of this great performance? By no means. Looking the other way, did it increase the grandeur or the terror of her first exhibition? Not in the least. With all great efforts of genius, it seemed disdainful alike of help or hindrance; and every audience appeared to wonder why the tragedy proceeded further, when at the final exit of the Lady Macbeth its very soul was extracted.

The policy of abstaining so long from the performance of such a character was now apparent, for by what other poetic wonder could it be followed? All other force in female character is comparative feebleness on the English stage. The Greek drama affords us one character which, had Shakespeare studied it in the three great tragedians of that people, and then, preserving Greek manners as ably as he did Roman, written it from his own heart and mind, might have been worthy to succeed the greatest achievement of the stage. The character I mean is Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon, the sister of Orestes.

By what even Voltaire has effected, the dreadful energies of Shakespeare may be half conceived.

In the fourth scene of the fourth act of "Oreste" he has something of Shakespearian vigour. The reader will not be sorry to compare on this occasion the dexterous Frenchman with the master-spirit of the drama.

"*Iphise.* Ne vous préparez pas un nouveau repentir.
[*Elle sort*]
Electre. Un repentir! qui? moi! mes mains désespérées
Dans ce grand abandon seront plus assurées.
Eumenides, venez, soyez ici mes dieux;
Vous connaissez trop bien ces détestables lieux,
Filles de la vengeance, armez-vous, armez-moi,
Venez avec la mort, qui marche avec l'effroi;
Que vos fers, vos flambeaux, vos glaives étincellent;
Oreste, Agamemnon, Electre vous appellent:
Les voici, je les vois, et les vois sans terreur;
L'aspect de mes tyrans m'inspirait plus d'horreur.
Ah! le barbare approche; il vient; ses pas impies
Sont à mes yeux vengeurs entourés des furies,
L'enfer me le désigne, et le livre à mon bras."

I see here, however different the subject, abundant proof to the critic of poetic feeling (and what is the critic without it?) that Voltaire caught this from the dreadful invocation of Lady Macbeth:

"Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty: make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

> Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
> Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
> And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes."

When I express this opinion, I am fully aware of two addresses of the chorus to the Eumenides, in the "Choephoræ" of Æschylus, and the "Electra" of Sophocles, of which the first is by many degrees the most sublime.

The next character acted by Mrs. Siddons was one intended to serve her brother rather than herself. I allude to her performance of Desdemona in "Othello," on the 8th of March, 1785; Mr. Kemble acting the noble Moor for the first time in town. The outrageous gallantry of French manners had not, in the time of Shakespeare, rendered the sex more prominent in the drama than it was in real life, — affectionate, modest, retiring, firm only to endure and suffer, the females of Shakespeare occupy but little space comparatively with his men. But a great critic, like Warton, might have been expected to discern the superior delicacy with which our great poet has invested what I even now consider to be the loveliest portraits of the lovely sex. Imogen, and Juliet, and Desdemona, and Viola, and the sweet and inexperienced Miranda, are all sisters in the firm allegiance of their affections to the favoured object. But there

is not one particle of the vulgar trumpery of stage heroism about them.

Brabantio, the father of Desdemona, is clearly no philosopher. He argues very perversely from his daughter's qualities. Hear him describe her:

> "A maiden never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blush'd at herself."

Surely such a spirit might of all spirits be expected to devour in silence the narrative of an exalted courage, — to love him for the dangers he has passed, and think a noble nature superior to all accidents of "clime, complexion, and degree." The doge, or duke, as he is called, seems to be worthy of his elevation, — he has a learned spirit of human dealing, and is so far from thinking Othello a practiser of arts inhibited and out of warrant that, having heard his story with the ears of gravity and age, he exclaims, with goodness equal to his sagacity:

> "I think this tale would win my daughter too."

When I say that such a part was little calculated to serve Mrs. Siddons, I look to the gross estimate of the vulgar. Yet one advantage it possessed even with them, — it was in the fullest contrast with the character in which she last appeared. It called upon them to observe whether the same great powers of art were not as faithful expositors of all the gentle, and I will say native, properties of the sex as of

those fierce and unnatural perversions, the growth of immeasurable ambition.

The exhibition afforded a strong proof of the plastic power of the mind. Its operation here absolutely seemed to lower the figure of the lovely being which had been so towering in Euphrasia, or terrific in Lady Macbeth.

There is one thing about a character written by Shakespeare in his full force greatly in favour of its impression; I mean those stores of gorgeous phrases which really enrich the mouth from which they proceed. If an actress have or soul or sense, a tongue capable of music, or a form susceptible of grace, what may she not effect with passages like the following address of Desdemona to her father?

> "You are the lord of duty;
> I am hitherto your daughter."

I may observe incidentally, in support of the legal employment of our great poet's youth, the close of the present speech, so inimitably given by Mrs. Siddons:

> "And so much duty as my mother show'd
> To you, preferring you before her father,
> So much I challenge that I may profess
> Due to the Moor, my lord."

Queen Katharine, in our author's "Henry VIII.," uses the same term in regard to Wolsey:

> "And make my challenge."

I was greatly delighted with the generous warmth that animated the supplication of Desdemona to go with Othello to the wars, —

> " My heart's subdu'd
> Even to the very quality of my lord."

Mr. Whiter might have found here a support to his ingenious theory, if it wanted one ; for Desdemona, touching the military quality of her lord, uses a metaphor drawn from his profession :

> " My downright violence and storm of fortunes
> May trumpet to the world."

I agree with that pleasing and learned writer, that this consonance of the figure might drop unconsciously from the poet. Such is the sure though unfelt operation of the associating principle in our ideas.

The elegant deportment, cordial manners, and smothered anxiety, on the landing at Cyprus previous to the arrival of Othello, exhibited a Desdemona which would have enchanted Shakespeare himself, who could so beautifully conceive what his own stage most assuredly never displayed.

Through the jealous scenes of this play I shall excuse myself from passing, by merely remarking that wherever they show the fair victim on the stage, the skill of our perfect actress produced the most intense sympathy. She was then acting on a stage where, if her eye had ever mag-

ical power, it then displayed it. How much I regretted the barbarous mutilation of the exquisitely natural scene which passes between her and Emilia, the third of the fourth act! The rage of the English for action in its wild impatience throws away a thousand delicate and essential touches of character, which, as they increase our love for the person, augment our sympathy with her fate. The critic can only beg that the play may be read in the volumes of Shakespeare, and the innocent but melancholy effusion of Desdemona noted among the felicities of the poet of nature. I have revisited the stage copy of this play, where it had shrunk from sight in my library; but where, curtailing fiends, is the foreboding direction to Emilia as to certain sheets?

> "If I do die before thee, prythee, shroud me
> In one of those same sheets."

The recollection of her mother's maid, poor Barbara? The song of "Willow," —

> "An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
> And she died singing it: that song to-night
> Will not go from my mind," etc.

The wandering away from Barbara, to notice delicately the "proper person" of Lodovico. The return to the "silly sooth" of the willow, and as quite unavoidable, singing in dirge-like strains

immediately before her death. The interruption to the strain, — "Hark! who is it that knocks?"

"*Emil.* It is the wind."

Her question as to the possibility of being false to wedlock. No hint of one of these things to be found in a copy of Shakespeare's "Othello," as acted at a theatre royal in an age called enlightened, is an argument for the transfer of such an epithet to the glorious period when such writing was felt to be natural and interesting, and therefore suited to the stage of our plain but intelligent ancestors.

On the last day of the month, Mr. Kemble was permitted to play Macbeth for his own benefit. We had now, therefore, a Glamis who could respond to the alarming incentives of the lady; and an early indication of the effect of such intelligence was the manner of his saying, at their meeting, in reference to the going of Duncan:

"To-morrow — as he purposes."

Kemble appeared to shrink from the quick glance which his sister turned upon him. Though his hopes had depraved his imagination, he seemed unprepared then for the maxim "be it thought and done," implied in her instant determination, —

"O never shall sun that morrow see."

Her acting throughout, on this occasion, was of the very highest quality. And here let me state, without undertaking absolutely to account for it, a fact peculiar, as far as I know, to Mrs. Siddons; I mean the very slight inequality in her numerous performances of the same character. In her brother's acting it might be truly observed that very frequently he was utterly below himself. He was cold and formal, paraded his person and his dress, and would walk the character about, as if teaching how it should move through the business and logically pronounce its sentiments. In his sister I never saw anything like this: it must have happened to her, as to every other being engaged in the concerns of life, to feel depressed by care, or absent by the rumination over probable occurrences. But on the stage, I never felt the least indication that she had a private existence, or could be anything but the assumed character. An argument, I should think, of a very powerful imagination.

A friend of mine, to whom upon most occasions I should gladly defer, thinks that "she was so various in her art as hardly to act the same character twice alike." I am much more inclined to say she was so profound in her art that her judgment settled once and for ever all the great points of the character; and not changing her view of what she had to convey, there was little difference to be detected that did not arise from

noise among what should have been audience, or the occasional assaults of personal indisposition. Indeed, how should the conception remain and the execution differ? or what is the judgment which is in frequent mutation? Firmness of thought is the parent of all vigorous action and utterance.

The delicacy of Mason's "Elfrida," as it had been much admired in the closet at Buckingham House, begot very naturally a wish to see the great preceptress represent the heroine of that drama upon the stage; and on the 14th of April she acted it for the first time, by command of their Majesties. The interest of this piece is in the resentment of a royal lover for being by a favoured servant deceived as to the personal graces of Elfrida, whom he makes his own wife, instead of opening a way to the throne for the ambition of her family. The king, by a sudden visit, ascertains the falsehood of Athelwold in the beauties of Elfrida; and, affecting the generous, forgives the treachery of his subject, but demands satisfaction from his rival as man to man; in other words, securely assassinates him, for, if the acknowledged guilt of Athelwold "did not sink him," how was he to bend his sword against his great master, without feeling himself a traitor? He, therefore, permits his Majesty's weapon to find a ready sheath in his bosom, and leaves his widow to the solemn devotion of herself to the cloister.

As the performance of a character not essentially dramatic, and written rather in imitation of the measured splendour of the masque at Ludlow Castle than the freedom and vigour of Shakespeare, could display merely the beauty and the milder graces of the actress, as it does not stand strongly discriminated in my memory by more than a few speeches in a single scene, I do not in this place feel myself disposed to go further into it. The effect was heavy, for the dialogue is diffuse and the fable thin. This may also be said of the Greek models from which it was constructed; but as we can but ill conceive the way in which the choruses of antiquity were rendered delightful, even when they do carry on the interest of the play, so on our stages no attempt whatever can be made but to arrange a line of vestals, or of soldiers, or of priests, — all uninformed, vulgar, awkward, and undisciplined; who affect no feeling while they are stationary, file to the right or the left, as they are led by the fugle lady or gentleman, endure the curses "not loud but deep," of the musicians in the orchestra, and only swell the score of the composer, for the most part out of harmony, and never in time.

On the same day that Mr. Mason's "Elfrida" received the honour of a royal command and the impersonation of Mrs. Siddons, he was deprived, by a gentle but sudden death, of an amiable

friend and very pleasing poet, in the person of Mr. William Whitehead, who, in the seventieth year of his age, expired without a groan at his residence in Charles Street, Grosvenor Square. He had on the 14th of April, 1785, sat down to table, but finding no appetite to his food, he rose, and took his servant's arm in the way to his chamber. In the action he died. He had been subject to difficulty of breathing and palpitations of the heart; the grand organ of vitality grew powerless in one moment, and a mild and virtuous existence closed without a struggle.

Our business with him here is as a dramatic writer, who, in one character, that of Horatius in "The Roman Father," supplied, first to Mr. Garrick, and then to Mr. Henderson, the means of very powerful impression upon the stage. Mr. Mason, in describing the modest conduct of Mr. Whitehead, and his almost actor-like love of quick and striking effects in the scene, has given us a valuable opinion as to Mr. Garrick himself, which the reader will apply beyond perhaps the object of its writer:

"Mr. Whitehead wrote with a view to scenical effect only; and, indeed, if he had done otherwise, his then virgin muse would scarcely have been so favourably received as she was by Mr. Garrick, who, at that time, in the meridian of his fame as an actor, and of his power as a manager, was sufficiently despotic to refuse admission upon the stage to any performance in which he could not display his prin-

cipal and almost unrivalled merits, the expression of strong but sudden effects of passion; for, conscious of his peculiar strength, he was rather pleased to elevate, by his own theatrical powers, feeble diction and sentiment, than to express that in which the poet might be naturally supposed to have a share in the applause. And so much persuaded am I of his foible in this point, that I believe, had Shakespeare been alive, and had produced his "Hamlet" to Mr. Garrick, precisely in the same circumstances that Mr. Whitehead did the tragedy in question, few soliloquies (which when he acted the "Hamlet" of a dead Shakespeare he was obliged to retain) would have been admitted by him without the most licentious pruning. For though no man did more to correct the vicious taste of the preceding age in theatrical declamation than he did, so far, indeed, as to change the mode almost entirely, yet this was not his principal excellence, and he knew it; and therefore disliked to perform any part whatever where expression of countenance was not more necessary than the recitation of sentiment." — *Memoirs*, p. 63 seq.

"Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat."[1] Nothing can be more certain than the judgment above cited in relation to Garrick. The residence of Mr. Mason was so far from town, that he probably never knew the actual tradings of Garrick with the soliloquies of Hamlet. But he was borne out to the very letter of his criticism. There is a very admirable specimen of audible thinking in the fourth scene of the fourth act of "Hamlet;" and very probably the passage most essential to the true

[1] *Cicero de Nat. Deorum*, l. 2.

development of Hamlet's mysterious character is the following:

"Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple,
Of thinking too precisely on the event," etc.

. . . . . .

"Rightly to be great,
Is — not to stir without great argument;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep?"

He then considers the imminent death of at least twenty thousand men, who, for a mere trick of fame go to their graves as unconcernedly as they would retire to their beds; and, for the present at least, Hamlet himself determines upon vigorous action —

"O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!"

As, however necessary, this soliloquy still continues unknown to the common audiences, I have been obliged to quote some part at least of so fine a composition, which one might have thought the most urgent actor would have found rather spirit-stirring and effective; but no, Mr. Garrick himself wrote the rhapsody which he chose to utter, in spite of nature and Shakespeare:

"Awake, my soul, awake!
Wake nature, manhood, vengeance, rouse at once!
My father's spirit calls. The hour is come!
From this time forth, my thoughts be bloody all.
I'll fly my keepers — sweep to my revenge."

It is delightful to him who reviews the progress of an actress to observe the striking contrast afforded by the female supports of the scene. The theatrical lord conceives himself paramount over both nature and art; the justest thoughts must give way to his personal exhibition; the finest poetry must be measured by his organ; whether the poet's design be understood or not is of slight moment where his own display is at stake; nay, even the movement of a few painted rags must supersede the just continuity of the action. When we look to his female partner of the scene, how different is the conduct! Did Mrs. Porter, or Mrs. Pritchard, or Mrs. Siddons ever re-write the scenes of Lady Macbeth? What did the best of them require of a character given to their study? "That it should be written in nature," — they were then satisfied that their talent could do the rest; and, relying upon their author, only strove to be worthy representatives of his genius. In some few instances they may have done more, when, like Mrs. Barry, they inspired a writer's muse as well as his passion; and the divine Monimia and Belvidera but echoed the feelings with which poor Otway's fancy endowed their fascinating model.

The Rosalind of Shakespeare's "As You Like It" had been a favourite character of Mrs. Siddons on theatres nearer to his Forest of Arden; and for her second benefit this season she ventured to appear upon the London stage in a dress which more strongly reminded the spectator of the sex which she had laid down than that which she had taken up. Even this, which showed the struggle of modesty to save all unnecessary exposure, was a thousand times more captivating as to female loveliness than the studious display of all that must have rendered concealment impossible. At present the ladies on our stages take dress as a matter merely indifferent, and appear by troops in male attire.

The longing of every good mind must be after the simplicity and virtue of rural, but not vulgar scenes; elegant but unaffected, where the head is always corrected by the heart, and the heart itself fashioned by the surrounding beauties of nature; where the trees of the forest possess the gift of tongues, and running brooks are as volumes which murmur wisdom to the studious.

> "Vain wish! those days were never; airy dreams
> Sat for the picture; and the poet's hand,
> Imparting substance to an empty shade,
> Impos'd a gay delirium for a truth."

Yet something like this, it is implied in our great poet's work, the forest magic may still yield

to such as seek its shades from the avowed treachery and cruelty of the populous city. Alas! he says no more than that the persecuted virtues of life, endeared by sympathy to each other, may exist in inaccessible deserts without "sin or blame," and find humanity wounded by even the necessary sacrifice of its velvet friends.

But the truth is that Shakespeare, the interpreter of nature, corrects the poet's day-dream even when he relates it. Orlando himself, a persecuted fugitive, almost reverses the picture which the duke had been drawing of an earthly paradise, in which the creeping hours were lost as well as neglected under the shade of melancholy boughs, by men who admit that they had seen better days, enjoyed the comforts of worthy hospitality, and the regulated consolations of religion.

Rosalind was one of the most delicate achievements of Mrs. Siddons. The common objection to her comedy, that it was only the smile of tragedy, made the express charm of Rosalind, — her vivacity is understanding, not buoyant spirits; she closes her brilliant assaults upon others with a smothered sigh for her own condition. She often appears to my recollection addressing the successful Orlando by the beautiful discrimination of Shakespeare's feelings. "Orlando" had been familiar, "young man" now coarse:

"Gentleman,
Wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune;

That could give more, but that her hand lacks means.
Shall we go, coz?"

Again:

"He calls us back: my pride fell with my fortunes."

And on the discovery that modesty kept even his encouraged merit silent, the graceful farewell faintly articulated was such a style of comedy as could only come from a spirit tenderly touched. The flight to the Forest of Arden, which the great Shakespearian Schlegel seems to have taken for the Ardennes, extending from Thionville to the frontiers of Champagne, and in the time of the Romans a forest of immense extent, exhibits the lovely Rosalind in male attire, accompanied by her more than sister cousin Celia. Like a stricken deer, she comes into retirement to languish of a wound for which activity is the only cure; but her lover is driven to the same retreat, and, as the very eloquent foreigner just named has observed, she finds that Love is despotic lord of the whole forest. "He teaches his lore to the simple rustic as well as to the cultivated courtier." To him whose wisdom only apprehends that "the more one sickens the worse at ease he is," and him whose very refinement leads him to render his verse continual incentives to his passion.

Rosalind is quickly aware that her preference is returned by Orlando; and, therefore, having sought a settled low content, in a sheep-cote

fenced about with olive-trees, leading to which is a rank of osiers bending over a stream that murmurs to the melancholy rustling of their branches, she soon in her disguise ventures to give her powers of wit free scope; and, instead of feeling impatience, is disposed to await the favourable issue of those events which seem to have arranged themselves. Mrs. Siddons put so much soul into all the raillery of Ganymede as really to cover the very boards of the stage. She seemed indeed brought up by a deep magician, and to be forest-born. But the return to the habiliments of Rosalind was attended with that happy supplement to the poet's language where the same terms are applied to different personages, and the meaning is expanded by the discrimination of look and tone and action:

"To you I give myself, for I am yours."

I believe it has not been remarked with what exquisite propriety the poet has made the usurping duke punish with the greatest severity a kindred crime committed by Oliver against his brother Orlando. We never approve villainy, though we commit it; and always cover it with some mask, as if it originated less in our passions than in some uncontrollable necessity. Man was made for virtue.

A doubt has frequently arisen how far plays of a character so imaginative are suited to a theatre.

Perhaps no very clear solution can be given. "As You Like It" has never been a very powerful magnet, yet it has never been without its attraction. I know not that Rosalind has suffered much, acted by either Mrs. Crawford, Miss Younge, or Mrs. Siddons. The roynish clown, Touchstone, also seemed to me perfectly suited to the manner of King. The part of Jaques is rather the shadow of a great humourist than "the true and perfect image of life indeed." He is a mere indifferent spectator among the children of earth, — he takes no part with or against any man; his account with the world is closed, and he is only solicitous to indulge his spleen. Of this character my friend Henderson seemed, in the poet's phrase, to have "sucked the melancholy," and left to his successors three fine set speeches to utter with good emphasis and good discretion, — no more.

This was a season of great exertion to our charming actress, who absolutely acted seventy-one times. The quicksilver in the treasury, or without a figure, the number of repetitions ordered of each play, will show their comparative attraction. But we should place in the foreground the novelties now introduced into her list of characters:

Margaret of Anjou ("Earl of Warwick") .	3 times
Zara (in "Zara")	2 "
Countess of St. Vallori ("Carmelite") . .	12 "
Camiola ("Maid of Honour")	3 "

Lady Macbeth (2d of February to the 10th of May)	13 times
Desdemona	5 "
Elfrida (Mason's "Elfrida")	2 "
Rosalind (at the season's close)	4 "

CHARACTERS OF HER FORMER SEASONS

Mrs. Beverley	5 "
Lady Randolph	3 "
Isabella	3 "
Euphrasia	4 "
Jane Shore	2 "
Calista	1 "
Belvidera	4 "
Zara	3 "
Sigismunda	2 "
	71 times

The list which is before us claims a few remarks. Doctor Franklin, and Aaron Hill, and Mason, and even Massinger, came and passed away like shadows, however informed with the pathos or the reason or the grandeur of the actress.

Cumberland had combined, along with Mrs. Siddons, Smith, Palmer, and Kemble; and a quite new tragedy, that did not look very unlike an old one, was repeated during the season twelve times, and gave its melancholy interest to very respectable audiences. But it was reserved for Shakespeare's prodigy of woman, Lady Macbeth, to be repeated thirteen times, and become, for the

remainder of the actress's life, the most powerful of all her attractions.

Of the early characters, the lowest in the scale was Calista, a part of great force, and acted by Mrs. Siddons with even transcendent effect. The play, too, possessing one of those scenes of altercation which are the delight of our taste, and a bier, and the slain Lothario to amuse the gaping vulgar.

CHAPTER IV.

THE preceding chapter will have demonstrated the prodigious attraction of Mrs. Siddons. For three seasons together she had delighted the town by the repetition of a limited number of our tragedies, of which, to say the truth, she was not only the first, but the sole moving principle. It should also be remembered, not in the estimate of her attraction, but her utility, that all her success had been attended with no expense to the theatre. Scenery, dress, decoration of every kind were reserved for Christmas prodigalities; and the legitimate drama in those days, it was thought, might be kept alive by the pathos or the humour of the performer. The comic strength of the Drury Lane company was unquestionably at this time as complete and perfect a force as could be formed by skill, or kept together by kindness; but the great receipts of the season were constantly numbered by the nights of Mrs. Siddons and tragedy.

When so much is thus attributed to Mrs. Siddons, it should be stated that the time was not arrived to give her the best aid of her brother,

Mr. Kemble. That great actor had appeared when the fires of a proud idolatry blazed brightly upon the altars erected to the genius of Garrick; he had to make way for a style of acting essentially original, striking, and learned, but bearing the marks of labour too sensibly in its early exertions. Smith held the first rank in the theatre, and, having a host of powerful friends, retained, even in tragedy, every character which he had been accustomed to play. In the lovers of tragedy Brereton, by much bustle, and a greater show of emotion, was commonly thought no mean successor of the persuasive Barry. The very studies of Kemble were objected to him as defects, and even a scholar could assail him in diurnal trash like the following:

"As to Mr. Kemble, he has so much knowledge, we are afraid to encounter him; but if we, in our ignorance, may offer him a little advice, it would be that he should pack up all his learning, his superior judgment, his punctuations, his quips and his quiddities, his gesticulations and his graceful attitudes, and fairly trundle them off the boards of old Drury; and if he can pick up in lieu of them a little nature, we will venture to assert it will not be the worse for him.

"Brereton recovers his health, and will recover his acting; but he must not relax his attention against the powers that would devour him."

This generous fable was signed "Esop."

The few plays of Mrs. Siddons's first season had now, however, sensibly abated of their attrac-

tion. Not from any doubt of their excellence, but from their almost endless repetition. The English are slaves only to novelty. With us there is little of that salutary prejudice in favour of the classics of the country, that keeps a national theatre devoted to the performance of its *chefs-d'œuvre*, and admits with the greatest caution any accessions to the established repertory. It is in Paris only that we find this grand predilection encouraged in every possible way, and the government itself supplying funds to raise, renew, and perpetuate the literary glories of the stage.

A commercial speculation must be profitable, or it must close. In the hands of adventurers Shadwell may be of more value than Shakespeare. It is a compliment to which all managers are not entitled, that they would prefer the poet to the buffoon, if the one were even as profitable as the other. Give the usurper the ascendency as to attraction, and the reign of genius is at an end. What, then, can bring about his restoration? Nothing but the accident of talent congenial with his own, which must find adequate materials for the display of its proper powers. The poet revives in the player. I cannot talk of dividing the laurels of Shakespeare even with Garrick; they are not to be divided; they sprung up by the side of his cradle, and spread in endless luxuriance around his tomb. The student of his immortal labours knows how imperfect the greatest efforts

of the actor will always be to unfold the amazing subtilty of his conceptions. The hurry of public utterance, the casual interruptions among a vast crowd of spectators, the failure of the ear itself, all forbid even the full enjoyment of the power which he has; shades of meaning have an exility that baffles the nicest articulation, the finest eye.

The bulk of mankind have neither leisure nor faculties for very accurate study; they must be content with the interpretations of actors, not the most attentive readers of poetry, nor even very minute observers of life itself; they must take the prescriptive manner of the profession, the habit of doing what had been done before; the show of thought rather than thinking; the mimicry of emotion, not very scrupulous as to its source or its effects; a look that merely bespeaks our sympathy; a tone that long experience has demonstrated to be the note of sorrow, and affecting us independent of particular ideas.

A genius in acting must, however, be a profound observer of life. He secretly revolves all the folds of his own heart; he mixes much abroad with the world of character, and all its indications are set down in his "tablets" as the materials with which he is to work. The poet's science is how man thinks and feels in all the relative conditions of his nature; the actor's how he speaks, and looks, and moves. The inward and the outward man may be the best as well as briefest indications of their

different provinces. When the author is himself an actor (an immense advantage, *ceteris paribus*), he will sometimes trace out both, and display not only what is to do, but how it is to be done.

"*Macb.* I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in 't: I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaught'rous thoughts,
Cannot once start me. Wherefore was that cry?
Sey. The queen, my lord, is dead.
Macb. She should have died hereafter."

If the reader ever saw anything like this frigid despair upon the stage, the remembrance of original nature in the death of all her living signs, the bearing about in our anatomy this petrifaction of the heart, he has seen what it has not been my fortune to behold. The actors all mimic the lost emotions, and show Macbeth mistaken.

Such hints are few even among our early writers. When, therefore, the great actor has fully imbibed the poet's design, he then reverts to the stores of his own observation, and accidents in real life become lessons which enable him to throw the truth of imitation upon the character which is under his study. Garrick's Lear is no doubt truly said to have benefited by the dreadful spectacle of a father who let his child escape from his arms while fondling it at an open window. He became

fixed in a distraction which perpetually beheld the accident renewed, and displayed for ever the original agonies of the father. The reader will see the places in which it suggested to the greatest of actors the recurrences, so frequent in Lear, to the cruelty of his daughters.

Such studies are absolutely essential to the actor, for whom the closet alone will do little. Without this actual experience of life he will certainly be unfaithful to the poet, and deliver his text in the usual style of meagre declamation. Where does the painter study expression, in the historian, or the poet? Oh, no; his eye is everywhere; he is the undetected spy upon his species, and watches for it unsophisticated and unprepared. Countenances are made up, manners are the children of discipline. Nature dressed is art, and clumsy art, until use has polished it into a second nature; a peasant child, alone, playing upon a bank of flowers, may be a model of the graceful and the expressive. Sir Joshua Reynolds used to shudder at the notion of a little miss before her dancing-master. I have seen in Mrs. Siddons hundreds of touches caught by herself from the real world, —

> "She is a great observer, and she looks
> Quite through the deeds of men."

It is commonly deemed no slight ordeal to have her steady gaze bent upon you, as she sits, too willingly, silent a long time in society. Nor is this

the result of prudence or reserve, for she has a sound understanding, and is well read,— it is choice : to observe is her mental discipline.

I had, I was going to say, gratified myself in this display of the stores which supply the great effects of art, when I was suddenly alarmed by the following passage, which I read in Warburton's works ; it is in the admirable dedication of the D. L. to the Free Thinkers : " Urceus, surnamed Codrus, being asked why he mixed so much buffoonery in his works, replied that nature had formed mankind in such a manner as to be most taken with buffoons and story-tellers." How stand I then in attempting to win a story-telling age to the description of a great intellectual charm, and the means by which it was accomplished ? I must, like others, be contented with the approbation of those who reflect, till a glut of nonsense may make sober efforts like mine to analyse our best enjoyments desirable even as novelty.

To proceed, I must observe that comedy, however it had aided the general services of the theatre, could not be said, even with the help of opera, to be fully equal to the single attraction of Mrs. Siddons. Miss Farren was greatly admired ; but her name put up in the most attractive comedy of Congreve, or Cibber, or Vanbrugh, or the more modern attractions of Murphy, Sheridan, or Cumberland, could not boast of that string of exalted visitors who followed in the train of the serious Muse.

The management of King, as it was natural it should, leant to the side of his own attraction, and very perfect indeed was comedy, as acted by himself, and Smith, and Palmer, and Bensley, with the broader forces of Parsons, Moody, Suett, Dodd, Baddeley, and the younger Bannister, — to which may be added the steady and unfailing charm of Miss Pope, the delightful pupil and successor of Clive. But, however powerful this force might be together, there seemed no chance that any single name in comedy should ever, as to fashionable life, divide the town with Mrs. Siddons ; when even that alarming trial of her stability was afforded by a young unpatronised actress in the York company. The reader sees that I can only allude to Mrs. Jordan. Certainly no lady in my time was ever so decidedly marked out for comic delight. She seemed as if expressly formed to dry up the tears which tragedy had so long excited, and balance the account between the dramatic sisters, which Garrick alone entirely succeeded to do in his own single person. For although his friend Johnson preferred his comedy, yet his Lear stood unapproached in the records of tragic excellence.

The mark of this great actress had been made upon all the little caresses of female artifice that inspire confidence because they presume ingenuousness ; all those sportive enjoyments of bounding youth and whim and eccentricity ; things that

are usually done laughing, and provoke the laugh of unavoidable sympathy. Her sphere of observation had for the most part been in the country, and "The Country Girl," therefore, became her own, in its innocence or its wantonness, its moodiness under restraint, or its elastic movement when free. Her imagination teemed with the notions of such a being, and the gestures with which what she said was accompanied spoke a language infinitely more expressive than words; the latter could give no more than the meaning of her mind, the former interpreted for the whole being. She did not rise to the point where comedy attains the dignity of moral satire, but humour was her own in all its boundless diversity.

She had no reserve whatever of modest shyness to prevent her from giving the fullest effect to the flights of her fancy. She drove everything home to the mark, and the visible enjoyment of her own power added sensibly to its effects upon others. Of her beautiful compact figure she had the most captivating use; its spring, its wild activity, its quickness of turn. She made a grand deposit of her tucker, and her bosom concealed everything but its own charms. The redundant curls of her hair, half showing and half concealing the archness of her physiognomy, added to a playfulness which, even as she advanced in life, could not seem otherwise than natural and delightful. But all this would have been inadequate to her preëminence

without that bewitching voice which blurted out the tones of vulgar enjoyment, or spleen, or resistance, so as to render even coarseness pleasing, or flowed in the sprightly measures of a joy so exhilarating as to dispel dulness in an instant. She crowned all this by a laugh so rich and so provoking, an expression of face so brilliant, and that seemed never to tire in giving pleasure, that the sight of her was a general signal for the most unrestrained delight.

We know that all this was but the imitation of a reality; her delight must have been, not in the part, but its success, — it could at most amuse her, and the twentieth repetition of the best written character must be matter of business, and serious business too; yet there was no languor to betray the constraint of a prescribed task; her vivacity always charactered as fresh sparkling truth, and even life itself seemed hardly to be so natural as her representations.

Nor did her powers as an actress stop here; for though the accomplished woman of fashion was not within her reach, and the heroine of tragedy was a mere day-dream of her youth never to be realised, yet there was a power of tenderness about her all but equal to her hilarity. I cannot say that the exterior indicated much sensibility (I use the term in its restricted sense); the charm was in an organ of amazing sweetness, which, when, as in Viola, it found a passage musically constructed,

poured it upon the ear in a strain of singular melody. As to what may be called the grammatical analysis of a passage, by which the construction of it is forcibly marked, the clauses well detached from each other, and yet the whole meaning bound together, there was no effort of the sort; the words streamed on from the beginning to the close: it was a land "flowing with milk and honey," and neither had nor appeared to need the cultivation of art. But delightful as her voice was in speaking, it showed its quality with rather increase of effect when, as she frequently did, she introduced any ballad story, serious or comic, to a common air, unaccompanied by the band. The effect of these voluntaries cannot be described, nor did I ever hear anything like them. She would begin often in one key and end in another; but every key to her unlocked the avenue to the heart.

I would not slightly pass over such a charmer as Mrs. Jordan in these memoirs of Mrs. Siddons. I have chosen to recall the memory of the only rival she could have in the profession purposely. That is not first-rate excellence which needs any caution as to its display. The human heart is so framed that the person whose attraction approaches to our own cannot be dear to us; and the ill-judging partisans of either lady used, I remember, to undervalue the other. The cry of one party was "Where is nature?" of the other, "Surely she is vulgar."

The answer to this sorry stuff was, that the speaking of Mrs. Siddons was the proper delivery of such a composition as tragedy written in verse, and that Mrs. Jordan's utterance was suited to the level of the characters which she performed, without the slightest tinge of fashionable affectation. The dispute was about the prize, public favour, which they equally merited, though on different grounds; and the portion of the one actress conferred rather more respect than that of the other. In the meantime the accession of this new charm might have been thought to secure the fortune of the theatre so highly gifted; and this it unquestionably would have done under any other man than Mr. Sheridan. I am not going to add to the vast mass of his irregularities by a childish love for his talents converted almost into a monument to his honour. One would really conceive, from some late narratives, that the first of all merits was "the art of using the property of others, a plausibility that nothing could resist purveying for need that ought never to have existed." When I number the persons connected with the Drury Lane property who have been ruined by their confidence in their matchless chief; when I see the enormous treasure dissipated, no man could ever guess how, and perceive this great mistaken man himself, for the most part, living at the table of others, I have a problem before me which all my knowledge of him cannot

solve, and an indignation is excited which all my respect for him cannot stifle.

Sheridan seemed decidedly adverse to innovation in the management of his theatre; for the most part he followed that of Mr. Garrick in all but the restless, unappeasable solicitude without which such a concern can never long succeed. "The Jubilee" was now revived, with what they at that time called splendour, and one grace it had, which no time will ever surpass, — Mrs. Siddons drawn in state as the Muse of Tragedy, and, as well as mere mechanism and motion could compensate the want of background, resembling Sir Joshua Reynolds's sublime portrait of her. But Jordan was not the Comic Muse of the show, but a tall, lifeless woman, whose name was Cuyler, exceedingly pallid, and whose features were ridiculously small for her size. The whole of the company were employed in the long procession of Shakespeare's characters, and the London elements were more propitious than those of Stratford proved to this effort of Garrick to do honour to his great master. This incidental allusion to the jubilee at Stratford may perhaps sanction what follows upon that much-contested subject.

The more I consider the matter, the more I feel disposed to admit the propriety of that celebration of our great poet called the Stratford Jubilee. The time of it was not so strictly appropriate. The year 1769 commemorated nothing that related

to Shakespeare. Five years sooner would have been a bicentenary from his birth; three years earlier would have been distant a century and a half from his death. Nor was the month of this festival chosen more happily than the year. Shakespeare was born, and he died, the 23d of April. The first day of the jubilee was the 6th of September.

But not to consider such matters "too curiously," whether it originated in veneration or vanity, it is an enviable circumstance in Mr. Garrick's life that he projected this tasteful celebration.

> "For Garrick was a worshipper himself:
> He drew the liturgy, and framed the rites
> And solemn ceremonial of the day,
> And call'd the world to worship on the banks
> Of Avon, fam'd in song. No few return'd
> Doubtless much edified and all refresh'd."

Two of the commentators upon Shakespeare amused themselves in trying their favourite weapon, ridicule, upon the importance and the poetry of Garrick at Stratford. The most trifling part of the business was that suggested by Doctor Johnson's celebrated line, —

> "Each change of many-coloured life he drew."

The ribbon weavers of Coventry were set to work to compose a ribbon to be called the Jubilee ribbon, which should be an emblem of his genius,

and reflect all the colours of the rainbow; and this manufacture being recommended by public advertisement, the eyes of the great steward were gratified by the affluence of these jubilee favours on the persons of the beauty and fashion which attended the celebration.

Warburton thus despatches Garrick's "Ode to Shakespeare:" "Garrick's portentous ode has but one line of truth in it, which is where he calls Shakespeare the god of our idolatry: for sense I will not allow it; for that which is so highly satirical, he makes the topic of his hero's encomium. The ode itself is below any of Cibber's. Cibber's nonsense was something like sense; but this man's sense, whenever he deviates into it, is much more like nonsense."

Warburton was now Bishop of Gloucester. His severity as to the poetry of Garrick, because unworthy of the god of our idolatry, is surpassed, as it ought to be, by his reprobation of the vocal charms at a musical festival for the benefit of the distressed clergy of three dioceses. I should rather have blushed at the cause itself than the means of its relief. But the passage is very characteristic.

"We, too, have had our jubilee; but held in the old Jewish manner, when it was a season for the relief of the distressed, which was truly singing to God with the voice of melody. We, too, and with a vengeance, exalted our singing voice, in the language of old Hopkins and Stern-

hold, the Cibber and the Garrick of their time for ode-making. But here we forsook our Jewish model. You know that the hire of a ——— and the price of a dog were forbid to be offered up to the God of purity. But we presume to offer up to him the hire of two ———. You may judge by what I am going to say what it is that passes under the name of charity amongst us. We have got for the distressed clergy of the three dioceses some £340. And to procure this we have levied upon the country £684. 6*s*. 10*d*. for their entertainment in fiddlers and singers; of which sum £100 is contributed by me and my coadjutor." —*Letter*, September 23, 1769.

The other commentator, Steevens, I believe, tried every way to annoy the actor who had been pronounced the best living commentary upon the poet's works. But when his parody selected Le Stue, the Duke of Newcastle's cook, as the subject of a rival statue and temple, he might be said to dishonour Shakespeare rather than Garrick; and to prove how dangerous it is in these cases, to the satirist himself, to be cursed with more malice than merriment.

"The Jubilee" at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, contained that procession of the characters of Shakespeare of which the programme had been composed by Garrick for a public progress through the town of Stratford. But the torrents of rain that poured down on the Thursday and Friday rendered so much of the scale of entertainment abortive. The three beautiful witches of the masquerade, Lady Pembroke, Mrs. Bouverie, and Mrs.

Crewe, seemed to adhere strictly to the poet's text, —

> "When shall we three meet again,
> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

Their power was universally acknowledged.

Although I should be the last certainly to discourage any attempts to honour the genius of Shakespeare, yet I should hardly give my sanction, humble as it is, to a barren erection, such as a temple, for instance, in the unthinking place of his nativity. I would rather use his name to form a provision, not for those who bear it, but, improving on the plan of his fellow comedian Alleyn, to erect a retreat in Stratford itself for a limited number of worthy members of his own profession. The edifice should be, if possible, erected on the site of the New Place; and I would give the tenants of rather a tasteful retirement the pleasure of looking upon the statue of their great poet, placed in the centre of the quadrangle they might inhabit, or in the gardens behind it. The theatrical funds of London might be associated with such a design, and elect to its comforts out of the candidates who should present themselves for Shakespeare College.

The municipal control to be in the Corporation of Stratford for the time being, to avoid the expense of a set of Masters and Fellows — utterly unnecessary to such an institution.

Such a thing as the above, however desirable, I am fully aware will never be done, because it administers only to human comfort, not to personal vanity. How happy would it make me to be compelled to correct my estimate of my own times by seeing such a hint adopted, and a neat and substantial building arise, in which such a man, for instance, as poor Wewitzer was might find a welcome refuge for his age, and a security from the misery of capricious dependence.

It was on the 26th of November that Mrs. Siddons acted the part of Mrs. Lovemore, in Murphy's very pleasing comedy, "The Way to Keep Him." The bow must not always be kept at its full stretch; our great actress required some relief from the severity of her personal exertion; beside this consideration for her health, some of her Bath admirers had a wish to widen the sphere of her town attraction by the display of the woman rather than the actress; and as she always kindled enthusiasm in those who truly admired her, they conceived that so fine a figure and a speaker so eloquent, moving through the actions of merely polished life in our modern comedies, might bestow a rather unusual charm upon them, and contrast admirably with the sparkling captivations of Miss Farren.

I remember well the effect the two ladies seemed to have upon each other. The Widow

Belmour would undoubtedly have been gayer with any other Mrs. Lovemore; and the habit of tragedy is so clinging, that the neglected wife of the wanton masquerader, Lord Etheridge, wore something of the sorrows of Mrs. Beverley in her general aspect. The assumed gaiety of Mrs. Siddons was certainly not comic. There was an insurmountable bar in the way to her imitating the manners of her friendly and enchanting adviser.

The object of "The Way to Keep Him" seems to be to recommend an impossibility to the practice of the wedded fair, — to keep up the attractions which won the lover in order to secure the husband. Perhaps only one of the author's maxims can be with much confidence relied upon, namely, to preserve a studious neatness in the apparel of the wife. But the sphere of duties is totally changed; the accomplishments of the girl are unbecoming the wife, who is probably a mother, certainly the mistress of a household. That the husband should not seek parties abroad, his lady is, it seems, solicitously to assemble parties at home. When the husband changes the gratifying object, it does not appear vastly important where he may find it; besides, that from minds thus facile and frivolous it were quite unreasonable to expect conjugal happiness.

After all, no general rule can embrace the variety of such cases. The new relations adopted by the parties will at last settle upon principle or

convenience. The passions of both must be controlled either by reason or necessity. But the really important point is early to regulate the objects of mutual expectation. Life has something of greater importance than either a drawing-room, a concert, a card-party, or a ball. Superficial accomplishments soon lose their value in domestic estimate; and we are then compelled to seek our happiness in fidelity and permanent esteem. The great moralist read to his friend Murphy, in a few lines, a lesson of more intrinsic value than even the elegant comedy we are considering. "Marriage," says the *Rambler*, "is the strictest tie of perpetual friendship. There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity; and he must expect to be wretched who pays to beauty, riches, or politeness that regard which only virtue and piety can claim." (*Rambler*, No. 18, at the close.)

I formerly expressed a doubt as to the policy of permitting Mrs. Siddons to descend from the higher sphere of tragedy, and I see no reason now to change that feeling. It will be said, Is not the impression of the actor doubled by his universality? Certainly; absolute risible comedy opposed to tragedy from the same performer may add to his fame, by exciting a pleasing astonishment. It was so when Garrick acted Lear and the Tobacconist; it was so when Henderson acted Richard the Third, and on the next evening Falstaff. But full

and almost violent contrast may be necessary, or the lighter effects will injure the stronger. If "The Country Girl" of Mrs. Siddons could have equalled her "Isabella," I should with some hesitation, even then, on account of her sex, have said: "Proceed in the track left by Shakespeare and Garrick, and make the world of character your own." But as her figure and her features could not bear the debasement of ridiculous exhibition, as the most that could be done for the sister empire was to assume some doubtful tenants upon the frontiers, subjects of either muse by turns, the effect was not strong enough to render the task desirable.

The actress whose mighty powers in tragedy were confessed in the agonies she excited in some, and the tears she drew from all, in Mrs. Lovemore allowed her audience to retire with an expression much too cold for her fame. "Very well" is a poor commendation for her exertions. Were it even certainty that no one could act the character better, there would always arise a cruel question for her importance: But what is it to do when done best? But, deserting the Lovemores, and the Oakleys, and the Sullens, and the Stricklands, suppose that, looking to the works of the great bard, we select a character of simplicity and truth, of which the sensibility is the great charm, and there is an utter want of all those ruling actions and passions which rouse and agitate, and

thus delight, the general audience. Alas, the fine essence of such characters is too thin for common perception; it will be caught only by a few, and waste its sweetness over the heads of coarse and negligent spectators. The reason of this has been pointed out in the language of an author whom I should injure not to call the most enchanting of all thinkers — Montaigne. "Nous n'aperçevons les grâces que pointues, bouffies, et enflées d'artifice: celles qui coulent sous la naïveté et la simplicité échappent aisément à une vue grossière comme est la nôtre; elles ont une beauté délicate et cachée; il faut la vue nette et bien purgée pourdé couvrir cette secrète lumière." If, rambling thus in quest of authority, I should lead the reader to the "Essais" of the incomparable Michel de Montaigne, he may accept a remark which will heighten his satisfaction in their perusal. The admired printer Didot has given the orthography of the author's age. The etymologist will see how much closer the French is brought by it to the primitive language; and the English scholar will be astonished to find the idiom infinitely nearer to his own tongue than the modern French is to the modern English; besides that, Montaigne's French has a grandeur in the choice of terms, and a numerous flow and sweetness in his sentences, partaking of the peculiar charm of the Spanish. The grammarian will be pleased with this view of a great master of language, but

every thinker should make De Montaigne one of the friends whom he most visits. But let me bestow far higher praise than this. There is no writer who does so much justice to the virtues of the laborious peasantry as this accomplished scholar; and his picture of the rustics who work upon his estate — "*qui ne s'allictent que pour mourir*" — has that in it to make philosophy blush at a wisdom and patience and gentleness beyond the reach of its ostentatious pedantry. See his twelfth chapter, third book, on "Physiognomy."

The stage, on the 25th of November, had a loss which forty years have not repaired. I allude to the death of Henderson, — a man of great genius, and possessing the most versatile powers that I have ever witnessed. He becomes associated with Mrs. Siddons, because, in despite of positive ignorance or prejudice in the Drury Lane management, he immediately, on her retreat from town, pronounced her to be the first and best of actresses, — to have in herself all that her predecessors possessed, and all that they wanted. I never was so happy as to see these excellent artists perform together. In town they were the ornaments of different theatres. The late king, with that pleasing warmth which was characteristic of him, once said that, "if he were a theatrical monarch, his two favourites should act upon the same stage." Even a hint of this nature, one might have expected, would have operated like a command; but

it was never attended to. During Henderson's readings from Sterne, I personally witnessed his power over the feelings of Mrs. Siddons; and the pathetic chapters of "Shandy" excited no few tears from the brightest eyes that I have ever seen. His alternations of humour and tenderness kept her in the situation of her own Cordelia, —

> "You have seen
> Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
> Were like, a better way. Those happy smiles
> That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
> What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
> As pearls from diamonds dropt."

The loss of such a man, before he had reached the fortieth year of his age, was deeply felt; and Mrs. Siddons, at the proper time, intimated to his representatives that, if a benefit was intended for his family, they would oblige her by the employment of her talents on that occasion. On the 25th of February, 1786, she spoke a prologue which the pen of his friend Murphy supplied, and showed all "the glory of her art" in a performance of Belvidera on the stage of Covent Garden Theatre, at that time the more splendid house, and capable of the greater receipt. Mrs. Abington added to the attraction her inimitable Lady Racket. The pit was let at box prices.

On the 4th of March, 1786, "The Distressed Mother" was acted for Mrs. Siddons's benefit,

and, as she had done in "The Mourning Bride" of Congreve, she took the more vehement character, and performed Hermione. However Phillips may rank as a pastoral poet, I have no hesitation in placing this translation of the "Andromaque" of Racine before any other version from either that poet or Voltaire. The *Spectator*, when it came out, practised the little disingenuous art of concealing totally its French origin, and was full, as we now are at times, of the greenroom tribute to its high excellence. "The player who read (we are told) frequently threw down the book till he had given vent to the humanity which rose in him at some irresistible touches of the imagined sorrow." But the tragedians of the city must have been rather different from their modern successors in consequence, however the case might be as to talent, when Steele, or Budgel, or Phillips himself, perhaps, could publish such a letter as the following, purporting to be signed by the actor who performed Orestes. George Powell had surely not acted Shakespeare and Otway and Dryden to be unmanned by a dilution of French tragedy. Thus he is made to write, however:

"MR. SPECTATOR:—I am appointed to act a part in the new tragedy called 'The Distressed Mother;' it is the celebrated grief of Orestes which I am to personate; but I shall not act it as I ought, for I shall feel it too intimately to be able to utter it. I was last night repeating a

paragraph to myself, which I took to be an impression of rage, and in the middle of the sentence there was a stroke of self-pity which quite unmanned me. Be pleased, sir, to print this letter, that, when I am oppressed in this manner at such an interval, a certain part of the audience may not think I am out; and I hope, with this allowance, to do it to satisfaction. I am, sir, your most humble servant,

"GEORGE POWELL."

The most impudent part of the business here is the very slender knowledge imputed to a first-rate actor, — his fear that on any discovery of emotion an audience who knew him should suppose that he was out; and the assurance of lowering even the style of the real author to support the assumed character, and putting the actor's name to the supplication of an undertaker, who hopes "to do his work to satisfaction." The truth is, that Powell was a scholar, and a very favourite actor, until his boundless intemperance closed the scene upon him. His friend, the *Spectator*, could take any liberty with such a man. He is represented as constantly inflaming himself with pure brandy, and making love upon the stage in so spirited a manner as to be extremely terrible to the ladies of the profession.

Racine's play was kept so completely out of sight that Powell might never have heard the danger of giving up the full bent of the actor to the part of Orestes; the violent exertion of its original representative, Montfleuri, absolutely

killed him. The son of the poet tells us that it was whimsically said on this occasion: "*Tout poète désormais voudra avoir l'honneur de faire crever un comédien.*"

Henriette Anne of England, the first wife of Monsieur, brother of Louis XIV., was the avowed patroness of the French tragedy, and its success is said to have equalled even that of Corneille's famous "Cid," which Colley Cibber so rashly adventured to translate. The "Bérénice" of Racine sprung also from her taste — the "chroniclers of that time" say from her passions. But the *crêpe funèbre* with which Bossuet covered her remains secures her immortality, if genius be immortal.

Addison himself did not disdain to aid the success of Phillips's tragedy. He took Sir Roger de Coverley to see it acted, and made it the vehicle of some elucidation of the knight's peculiar character, and some remarks upon the play itself. An instance of each incidentally shall be pointed out. Upon Andromache's obstinate refusal of her lover, he exclaimed with a more than ordinary vehemence, "You cannot imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow." And upon Pyrrhus's threatening afterward to leave her, the knight shook his head and muttered to himself, "Ay, do — if you can." For criticism may be taken the following: "He made, indeed, a little mistake as to one of the pages, whom, at his first entering, he took for Astyanax; but he quickly set

himself right in that particular, though, at the same time, he owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, 'who,' says he, 'must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him.'"

The absence of the child of Hector from the scene only, for his mother we hear visits him daily, will be regretted by more than the worthy knight just quoted; and particularly by those best acquainted with the resorts of tragic emotion. What a beautiful use is made by Southern of the son of Biron, in "Isabella," to check, and at length decide, the acceptance of Villeroy for a second husband! Such an accession as a visible Astyanax, I can have no doubt, would have fixed Mrs. Siddons to the widow of Hector, rather than the furious daughter of Helen. She acted Hermione with all that storm of passion which is characteristic of her nature and her provocations; but the rant of heroic passion, from her, begot a regret that the soft sorrows of Andromache lost so beautiful and so dignified a representative. Shall I say that I greatly preferred Mrs. Siddons in the relations of wife and mother? Her affections always seemed to need the inspiration of some duty.

Doctor Delap had sufficient character as a classical scholar to secure the attention of managers to his dramatic efforts; though his Cambridge qualifications of D. D. and S. T. P. might seem to challenge his attention to very different objects.

He commenced his tragic career with "Hecuba," and being unable to find in Greek tragedy more divisions than the prologue, episode, and exode, — the intervals being appropriated to the chorus, — he divided his English "Hecuba" into three acts; the audience, too, restricted it to three nights' performance. But his living in Sussex does not seem to have possessed that *speluncam tetram et horridam* which his master Euripides found the proper site for tragic composition.

There is a love of the wild and gloomy which is apt to seduce the tragic writer from human passions to modes of existence fantastic and impossible. Ossian for a time seemed to be considered, like Homer, an epic writer from whom tragedy might be derived; but nothing was to be had but a few figures not very well defined, and an engraft of ancient barbarism upon the feelings and sentiments of polished life. "The Captives," by Doctor Delap, displayed the well-known names of Connal and Everallin and Malvina, to enchant the followers of Macpherson, and some passages of no slight power, divested of the affected sublimities of that impostor; but though Mrs. Siddons did her utmost in Malvina, and Kemble wore the Scottish dress (the only one, by the way, that the parsimony of that day would consent to in the tragedy), yet his play was treated as usual by the audience, and "The Captives," like the great captive "Hecuba," lived but three nights.

In the progress of Mrs. Siddons modern tragedy should not detain us long. The power of tragedy, I reluctantly say, had left the soil in which it once flourished most. The passions had owned the master hands which alone could wield their powers, and refused to repeat themselves at the call of the humble mimics of our own times. Our great actress aided the sickly tragedy of "Percy" by acting the part of Elwina; but Miss More had not strength enough for the iron times of which this play faintly reminded us.

For the benefit of Mr. Kemble his sister was, perhaps, rejoiced to repeat the character of Portia, in "The Merchant of Venice," which had first introduced her to a London audience. I have nothing to add to what I formerly wrote upon this occasion. The nerve of the comedy is Shylock, and King was not the Jew which Shakespeare drew; though, as to Bassanio and Portia, perhaps those characters were never acted with more beautiful effect. Passion, however, is wanting, and the great enchantress quits her wand, and the spells with which it could encircle her, to charm by personal graces and sensible elocution. The play has little real interest; it is a romance, and suited to the closet. It is always felt to be impossible that Shylock should succeed, though the quibble may not strike by which he is to be defeated. In every Christian state the bond would be illegal from its tenor. The other incident of the caskets is too

absurd to exist among the blaze of moral wisdom in which our poet has displayed it. The chance that good men may have inspirations as to the future should not subject human happiness to the decision of a lottery. There is as little doubt of Bassanio's success as of Shylock's failure. But no play more abounds in the peculiar splendour of diction, by which Shakespeare sometimes delights to cover the feebleness of his fable. I ought also to notice the peculiarly musical flow of his lines in this play. Perhaps his works do not supply another instance of equal care in this particular; the absence of the stronger demands of passion and humour left him at full liberty to indulge the ear with his utmost sweetness.

The two benefit nights, with which the policy of the management had clogged the engagement of Mrs. Siddons, imposed upon her the unavoidable search after novelties of attraction. On her second night this season she acted Ophelia in "Hamlet," and I retain the impression which it then made upon me, but little lessened by time or maturer study of the great author. It might at first be thought that her figure would not express the fragility of this lovely sacrifice to her affections; but the height was diminished by lowering the head-dress, and the countenance permitted not the eye to be discursive.

"Ophelia," says a writer of great genius, "is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be

dwelt upon. O rose of May, O flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads." The same writer is disposed, however, to excuse some of the free language of Hamlet to this pure being "as the license of the time." I am sorry to find it, notwithstanding "the fatness of these pursy times," addressed to one who would hardly "unmask her beauties to the moon." Hamlet took a libertine pleasure in wounding the ear, allowing him to rely that Ophelia's blush —

> "Would never thaw the consecrated snow
> That lies in Dian's lap."

There is a modesty that inspires decorum even to the dissolute. Full of the important business of the play, anxious to seem idle that his object might be concealed, he ought to have placed some guard upon his fancy when he forces a conversation with Ophelia. Hamlet is gross, at least in the original play.

Mrs. Siddons was the only great actress whom I ever saw in Ophelia; but in confirmation of a remark, made certainly with this instance strongly in view, what she gave, and alone was competent

to give, was caviare to the multitude. Too long accustomed to receive a dishevelled singer as the true and perfect image of Ophelia, all the fine essence of such a being, breathing through Siddons herself, hardly moved their wonder; though her deportment through the earlier scenes was a model of graceful virtue, and that of her distraction was the truest delineation that was ever made from a "ruined piece of nature." But methinks I hear some very inquisitive reader exclaim, "What! Mrs. Siddons sing!" No, sir, it was Ophelia who sang, or rather the melancholy of the poet Collins.

As to the dialogue, the "thought and remembrance fitted," the "document in madness," the dreadful "There's rue for you" to the queen, were then indeed powerfully given. The art of playing this scene is beautifully unfolded by a "Gentleman" in the original play. Hear what the poet of nature put into the mouth of a personage without a name:

"She speaks much of her father; says she hears
There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;
Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt,
That carry but half sense: her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection; they aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
Which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures yield them,
Indeed, would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily."

Incidentally, because the passage follows this, I would beg leave to notice symptoms of no common guilt acknowledged by the Queen of Denmark:

> "*Queen.* To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt."

To the guilty mind every trifle seems pregnant with disaster. This is the nature of sin, to dread discovery from accidents unconnected with it in fact, and thus to drop indications of what it would conceal by an undue alarm at any occurrences that excite much attention.

The "black and grained spots" upon her soul, which would not "leave their tinct," in the closet scene, seem to be equally visible to her fancy here, and argue strongly for her participation in the design, at least, of the murderer. She would not, like Lady Macbeth, "bear the knife herself," but had allowed her passions to triumph over her reason and her virtue, and stooped to prey on garbage. In the elder play the queen disavows the murder; this declaration Shakespeare did not adopt; he, therefore, meant to load her with the full weight of the crime, from which two lines only would have relieved her. It may be observed, too, that, as a righteous retribution, she at last perishes by the leprous distilment which her husband had prepared to

destroy her son, as he had formerly destroyed his father.

To return to Mrs. Siddons, she closed the feast of this memorable day by performing the Lady in Milton's "Comus," — a character, be it observed, that I believe his own times to have not unfrequently exhibited. An estimate has been made, in which I entirely concur, that places the cultivated female of the middle of the seventeenth century greatly above her successors. For this fine picture of the sex we were indebted to the lives of the Hutchinsons.[1] But Milton himself has left us, in immortal verse, sketches of some ladies of his acquaintance, by no means inferior to the heroine of his masque. Her, for instance, of whom he writes:

> "Thy care is fix'd, and zealously attends
> To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
> And hope that reaps not shame."

And that nearer object of his admiration, who, visiting his slumbers, —

> "Came vested all in white pure as her mind:
> Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight,
> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
> So clear, as in no face with more delight."

[1] See the thirteenth volume of *The Edinburgh Review*, and the beautiful article upon this subject, which contains the estimate above alluded to.

Such we may fairly presume his Dowager Countess of Derby to have been, and such the lamented Marchioness of Winchester. Ben Jonson would supply us with other instances were they necessary upon the present occasion. Human nature is interested that the high-souled heroine of "Comus" should not be a creature of the fancy merely. The Lady of "Comus" is a high Platonist, and the monstrous rout of Comus are received as of times purely pagan; but the close of the drama introduces us to the splendid festivity of a feudal chieftain. The heaven that had tried the youthful progeny of this noble is the Christian heaven, and their faith has been subjected to trial equally with their truth and patience. The spirit, however, quits them at last for the Gardens of Hesperus; and celestial Cupid holds his Psyche entranced until that union is permitted, from which love and joy are to be born — where, again, he plainly shadows that operation of divine love upon the human soul, from which eternal happiness was to proceed as the crown of terrestrial virtue.

But an interest such as has been shadowed out, and a sublime and eloquent woman seen across an orchestra of fiddlers, with all the glitter of glass chandeliers, and all the vulgarity of a mixed audience as a chorus! Oh, no, such things are not theatrical; they belong to purer times, and the pastoral retreats of splendid rank and exalted virtue.

CHAPTER V.

THE management of Drury Lane Theatre seemed to have no characteristic but indifference or sameness. Mrs. Siddons, in the season of 1786–87, repeated her former characters on her accustomed nights of acting, and on the 22d of November Dodsley's "Cleone" was revived, and repeated on the 24th; but it then sank into its former repose, from which the maternal agonies of Mrs. Siddons (who must have been an eagle to a wren compared with the original heroine) were not mighty enough to preserve this affecting play, written by a most amiable and able man. I incline to think that even in this commercial land there is a reluctance to award the honours of letters to any of the sons of trade, however they may have been gifted by nature, cultivated by youthful or mature application. The bookseller might be considered an innovator among the makers of books. The early efforts of this pleasing writer had the honour to be patronised by Pope. Dodsley was often reminded by the petulant professors of polite letters that he had once worn a livery in the service of

the Honourable Mrs. Lowther, but he soon exchanged it for that of the Muses, and honoured them by his offerings. Few men have placed upon our shelves productions of greater value than his fine collections of old plays and modern poems, with the admirable compendium of annual life called "Dodsley's Register." That he should have retired from business with a handsome fortune was to be expected from the discernment of his mind and the prudence of his conduct. Nor was he parsimonious as to his authors. Mr. Burke, by the contract which I have seen, was to have had £600 for "An Essay toward an Abridgment of English History to the Reign of Queen Anne." It was stipulated, whimsically enough, that it should be printed in quarto, exactly like Jarvis's "Don Quixote." Hughes, his printer, does not seem to have composed more than forty-eight pages of this work, of which Burke, however, wrote somewhere about two hundred and fifty of Jarvis's pages. I presume the appearance of Hume led Burke to view his own composition as rather oratory than history; it is a commentary upon events with which the reader is presumed to be already acquainted, and, I think, considerably resembles the "Letters of Bolingbroke on History." However superior in some respects, more gorgeous even than St. John himself, imitation of that noble lord clung to him through life, though he has spoken slightingly of him in his

latter works, and thinks his master's writings have taken no hold upon his mind. For this digression, leading to such a genius as Burke, I apologise not to the admirers of Mrs. Siddons, whom that great man has immortalised by naming her with Garrick in his work on the French Revolution.

Our great actress presented her friends with "Cymbeline" as her first benefit, on the 29th of January, 1787. She performed Imogen in such a way as to at once satisfy the student of Shakespeare that if ever complete justice could be done to the loveliest of his female characters, that wonder was then achieved. The bad taste of former times was accustomed to lend itself to a miserable series of keen or coarse invectives against the sex. The satirist has dressed the libels in verse, and the daily delinquency of the man still dares to mutter the tuneful fragments upon the frailty of woman. But the real truth is, that absolute steadiness of affection, enduring all tests, and pardoning all neglects and even injuries, resides only in woman.

The essence of the sex, the pure and perfect chrysolite, is to be found in Shakespeare's Imogen. Nor is she a creature of the imagination. Neither is she the child alone of refinement. In humble life, and in the dangerous services of our army and navy, the village girl assumes the garb of the other sex, and fights and bleeds and dies beside the object of her untutored affection. Imogen, too, is the native of all climes.

In the first scene of the character, Mrs. Siddons was fully aware of its almost infinite variety. Contempt for the affected courtesy of the queen, the ardour of her affection for Posthumus, the delicacy of their interchange of tokens, the brutal rating of the king, answered quickly as in despair, and the perfect tone of her reply to Cymbeline's exclamation, "What! — art thou mad?"

"*Imo.* Almost, Sir; heav'n restore me! — would I were
A neat-herd's daughter, and my Leonatus
Our neighbour-shepherd's son!"

All these points, with the sarcasm as to Cloten expressed in language so truly feminine, opened a delineation which continued equally true in every feature to the end:

"I would they were in Afric both together,
Myself by with a needle, that I might prick
The goer-back!"

A scene succeeds this much too short to take deep effect upon the audience, though it is beautiful in the extreme. It is on the departure of Posthumus, and between Imogen and Pisanio, — positively unrivalled in ardour and delicacy.

Few people would be at a loss to conceive how finely Mrs. Siddons would receive Iachimo, when he comes over upon his villainous enterprise, — her appearance, as abating, from his poisons, somewhat of her confidence in her husband, and the amazing

scorn and returning reliance which compel him to change his calumnies into panegyric. Imogen is nothing like the cautious Macduff ; she does not say :

> " Such welcome and unwelcome things at once,
> 'Tis hard to reconcile."

She easily considers him to make amends for the freedom of his former speeches. Her virtue has no fierceness about it, and knowing herself superior to all temptation, she is no longer indignant when she has brought her assailant to entertain for her a suitable respect. He comes from Posthumus, and at length speaks him truly. Her heart satisfies her reason, and his villainy immediately suggests to him a safer course. Iago himself is not so pure a rascal as Iachimo.

The scene of the trunk in the bedchamber of Imogen is an admirable stage invention : the poet has used it to paint, with the richest colours, the sleeping charms of his heroine, and even by her favourite reading to infer her love of suffering virtue. " Where Philomel gave up," I presume alludes to her last feeling of the brutal violence of Tereus, who had torn out the tongue which reproached him. The beautiful Ovidianism closed her lecture :

> " Ipsa jacet, terræque tremens immurmurat atræ."

The arranging with Pisanio what relates to their journey to Milford Haven charactered a good

deal like her Rosalind, and indeed the play partakes in a considerable degree of the character of "As You Like It." It breathes of the country, but has the boldness of the mountaineer instead of the listless patience of the forester. The agony attending Pisanio's disclosure is written with a perfect luxury of power, and was acted so as to extend the captivations of the actress. The cave of Belarius, and the mingling with congenial nature, operates somewhat to banish the leading interest, yet it is recalled to us by the poet with his most consummate art, and the reference to it proceeds from the mouth of one who never heard of Posthumus, and is ignorant even of the very sex of Imogen. Hear Guiderius:

> "I do note
> That grief and patience, rooted in him both,
> Mingle their spurs together."

When Imogen is supposed dead by her brothers, the poet invests her with new charms, and she seems like the progeny of beings superior to humanity.

On the incidents thus alluded to in the cave, Schlegel, the great German critic upon Shakespeare, has the following admirable observation:

"When a tragic event is one only in appearance, whether the spectator be informed of the fact or it be only designed that he should divine it, no poet so well as Shakespeare knows how to soften a melancholy impression without

quite effacing it. He gives to grief a harmonious expression, and bestows in solemnity what he takes away in energy."

What a comment on the exquisite dirge over the entranced Imogen! I will just remark in passing that Mr. Collins's dirge, for the most part, preserves the images of Shakespeare; though the two first stanzas remind us of village life, rather than that of the forest or the mountain.

The character of Imogen is here closed: the rest is "labour which is not used for her" any other way than as it explains the history of her dangers and restores her to Posthumus, for whom she retains an affection of which the reader inclines to think him hardly worthy.

When I assert that Mrs. Siddons was the only perfect Imogen that I have ever seen, I am fully aware that some representatives have more exactly answered to the fond and tender delineations of Fidele, which upon her recent loss are made by the two princes her brothers; that the form and style of features of Mrs. Siddons were essentially majestic, and her expression always of the most powerful kind; but we are to remember that in the male attire the female figure always becomes visually deceptive, and that I am not speaking of the Mrs. Siddons of 1802; that in reality Imogen is a character of infinite energy, and that the spectator must contribute to his own pleasure by overlooking the operation of that time upon the

actress which has consummated her art; that when subsequently she had Charles Kemble and Decamp for her brothers, she looked indeed the perfect sister of the family, and the illusion was complete.

The amateurs of transformation in those days a little complained of the delicate style of her male attire; but it was exactly the straight or frock-coat and trousers of our modern beaux; and you saw, as you ought in fact to see, the attempt at the opposite sex not quite successful.

I restrict myself to the novelties of Mrs. Siddons's performance, because I made a determined point of seeing them in their succession, and never allowed any other attraction to dispute with the most refined of my amusements. She, I know, owed little to her admirer, but he has always retained a feeling of grateful respect toward the possessor of talents so distinguished; and in thus reviewing their effects, I, perhaps, render even a slight service to the admirers of the drama.

The character of the countess in Jephson's "Count of Narbonne" was acted by her on the 8th of March, 1787, for the first time in London. It was unquestionably a melancholy picture of submissive dignity and maternal fondness, — but without the invigorating passion of Lady Randolph. The flow of Jephson's versification had every grace from a speaker so accomplished, but whether from the spell of a first impression, or the almost enthusiastic quietism of Miss Younge,

in this single instance I could almost prefer that lady to her far greater rival.

On the 29th of the same month she acted, on her brother's night, Lady Restless, in Murphy's diverting comedy of "All in the Wrong." The wild and ingenious jealousy of Sir John and Lady Restless is complexional in them both; but the poet has contrived the matter of recrimination with much adroitness, — the use made of Beverley and Mrs. Marmalet is entirely of the French school. When he had once accepted the whole act of Molière's "Cocu Imaginaire," Murphy could invent and talk what remained in the light and airy taste of our polished neighbours.[1] The busi-

[1] It suited Murphy to acknowledge, by an advertisement, some hints received from the "Cocu Imaginaire" of Molière; and the author of the "Biographia Dramatica" takes his word for it, and proceeds to compliment him upon his fable, and the conduct of it, — his characters and so forth. The truth, however, is that the Sganarelles are merely one step lower in life than the restless pair, and in some parts of his dialogue Murphy even forgets that; but he translates literally whole scenes, distended, observe, by the intrusion of additional characters. The French piece is of one act, containing twenty-four scenes or changes of some of the characters. To know the extent of Murphy's obligations, the reader should peruse the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth of Molière's scenes, then the eighth and ninth, and lastly the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth. He will find the "hints" full of the most ample detail; and the dialogue rather flattened, as it must be, containing no compensation for either Molière's verse or his rhymes. I am obliged to add that the author would now be invaluable who could even steal us such plays as Murphy's; but the sources are exhausted, and our neighbour all but as poor as ourselves.

ness teems upon the spectator, and is never of that sort which the dullest may anticipate. You know that the husband and wife will be confirmed in their error, but the trick escapes you till it is played. Beverley is the stage original, I think, of Falkland in "The Rivals," and Sheridan has remembered his obligation by making that name the assumed one of Lydia Languish's lover, Captain Absolute.

Mrs. Siddons had as much bustle as the restless lady required, and spoke the dialogue naturally and skilfully; but the laughter excited was not of the hearty kind. How Miss Haughton played it from Murphy's instruction I have no knowledge; but we know that Yates was his Sir John Restless, and I think there is more actual comedy in the wife than in the husband. I believe a repetition of the play was not called for on the present occasion; and whether welcome or otherwise, the general judgment seemed to be that at least modern comedy did not come within the range of our great tragedian. I have ventured before to think the very attempt impolitic, as sullying the consequence of female tragedy. Mrs. Yates, it should be remembered, in this comedy acted Belinda (Beverley's Julia), not Lady Restless; and Mrs. Yates had more of Siddons than any previous tragedian of that age.

The revival of "The Count of Narbonne" at Drury Lane Theatre was the precursor of a new

tragedy by Captain Jephson, called "Julia." The exertions of Mrs. Siddons and her brother in the former play had suggested to the ingenious author a second display of her powerful talent, in which the passions should be touched in a deeper and alarming key, and love and jealousy and hatred excite all that was terrible in dramatic effect. Mentevole, the part assigned to Mr. Kemble, worked out considerably beyond the Julia in the composition of the play, whatever might have been designed in the sketch. It was the true Italian lover. The incident, it seems, had once actually occurred in Guernsey, for frantic passion is confined to no one spot; the author, however, was certainly judicious in choosing that soil for the birth of his hero which is said to engender alike the deadliest crime and the greatest genius, and every produce is luxuriant even to rankness.

"It is the bright day that brings forth the adder."

This play is "the image of a murder" done in Genoa, where, on the eve of his intended marriage, a young nobleman is found murdered. As he wore a picture of the bride, his assassin, passionately enamoured of her, brings it away with him. Finding the brother of the deceased likely, as he thinks, to become another bar to his wishes, he challenges him. The lady, to prevent the probable mischief, sends a message to him by

his sister, who finds him in rapturous ecstasies over a portrait, which he lets fall. Upon taking it up she discovers it to be a miniature of Julia, superbly set in brilliants. With the true female estimate of such shining testimonials of affection, she carries it back with her, and leaves it upon her toilet. It is there, not very naturally, but very necessarily, discovered by the mother of the deceased, who, knowing that her wretched son wore it when he was assassinated, infers a complicity between its present possessor and the person from whom it must have come into her hands; it is traced to Mentevole, and Julia is seen to have been entirely innocent. The assassin finishes the turbulent career of his passion by stabbing the woman on whom he dotes before he is led off to suffer for his guilt.

The exertions of Kemble were so great as to prevent him from acting again for a considerable time; and the motion adjourned *sine die* here, as on a more real stage, is commonly lost. It is, perhaps, more truly tragic than any other effort of the same author. But when I read it some years since, I could not help regretting the absence of another power as essential as terror, without which healing spring the wounds of tragedy are too harsh and deep to be endured. Tragedy may fitly rest upon villainy in progress, for you sympathise with the sorrows of its victims as they succeed each other; but the mere detec-

tion of a murder seems better trusted to a court of justice than a drama.

The metaphorical language of Mentevole has been blamed by certain critics, but they should know that they have Longinus against them; who tells us that "the proper time for metaphor is when the passions are so swelled as to hurry on like a torrent." The figures, however, should share in the character of such turbid emotions, and be cloudy and indistinct, broken and irregular. The most perfect exemplification of this rule of the great critic may be found in the page of the greatest of poets.

> "And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
> Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubim, hors'd
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye."
>
> — *Macbeth.*

When some blockheads once quoted this passage to Ben Jonson, as one they thought in its expression strained and unnatural, he told them "it was horror." They gave the world one more proof how much discernment they wanted, by conceiving that great man to have concurred with them in the censure; whereas he vindicated his friend, and laid down the true law by which passion emits its expression, in a single word, — "it is horror."

"Julia" was even unfortunate during its preparation. Mr. Colman had written an epilogue which

Mrs. Siddons, after some deliberation, refused to speak. At this distance of time it would be difficult to conceive what could induce her to turn round the most brilliant epilogue writer of the age, and deny to either Jephson or herself the interest which attached to any production of an author so admired and esteemed; himself, too, an admirable critic, and moreover a manager of a London theatre.

Mr. Colman was naturally much hurt by the disrespect shown to his muse; and he was even angry when he heard from rumour that the cause was its alleged indecency. For this strange notion I can discover no ground, unless it might be thought indelicate to allude to an Italian lover. "Happy is the lady," says Mr. Colman, "born in England, —

> "With pity who beholds poor Julia's fate,
> Yet prizes, as she ought, her happier state;
> The charms of English worth who can discover,
> And never wish for an Italian lover."

It had originally been designed for Miss Farren. Mrs. Siddons, however, was so important to the play that it was deemed advisable to compliment her with the epilogue. Now all this was injudicious. Why should an actress, who dies during the play, be compelled to giggle down her own serious effects, simply to have the unnecessary plague of recovering instantly from what is sup-

posed to be great toil, and even pain, and ask personally the reward of her exertions? Surely to convert the gloom that has been inspired into pleasant feelings is better suited to the natural comedian than the daughter of Melpomene. I do not like to see that I can be tortured at so little an expense of suffering by the actress. Illusion there must be, but it should not look like a trick: and I should hate the buffoon who, rising from the curse of Lear, could run off the stage in the mimic character of Harlequin.

It is no mean gratification, in writing the memoirs of such a genius as Mrs. Siddons, that the regard every author feels for his subject calls upon his discretion for no sacrifice of the merits of others. He can view them in their course and speak of their excellence; he can follow them to the grave and be the register of their fame. This reflection is suggested by the death of Mrs. Yates, which occurred on the 3d of May, 1787.

This great performer began her town essays with the same incident as Mrs. Siddons herself. She was engaged by Mr. Garrick in one year, and discharged or permitted to retire the next, as no longer worth retaining. When, upon her marriage with Yates, she returned to Drury Lane Theatre, she was endured for the most part as a substitute in any indisposition of Mrs. Cibber; and, in 1759, was perhaps the most beautiful representative of Shakespeare's Cleo-

patra, then compressed for the stage by his editor, Capell.

She had decided talents for comedy, and at the death of Mrs. Cibber, in 1766, was left without a rival in tragedy. It is difficult to account for her frequent retirements from the London theatres, except that the excellence which is alike admitted by the public and the managers may in a commercial estimate not be quite worth the emoluments which, the rare talent considered, it may by no means be avaricious to demand.

I could obviously only see her in my youth. But it is impossible to forget the dignity of her person, the beauty of her features, and the pensive music of her declamation. She had a decided preference, it should seem, for tragedies of the descriptive kind, and gave a graceful existence to compositions of little more than tuneful feebleness. The gentler passions seemed more within her scope than the terrible. Her Andromache was distinguished by all the tenderness of soul which our imagination bestows upon the widow of Hector. Her last performance was the Duchess of Braganza, in Jephson's play, on the 24th of May, 1785, when she acted for the benefit of Mrs. Bellamy, who had once been no mean rival even to Mrs. Cibber herself.

I should not forget the manner in which she recited Sheridan's monody on Garrick, which, however unsuited to the stage, inasmuch as it

flows in a languor of melodious verse at great length, with few breaks, no bold apostrophes, and no attempts at impersonation, yet I cannot but pronounce to have charmed me beyond anything that I had previously heard from a human voice. It taught me what it was that Henderson intended six years afterward to combine with his own public readings. Had he lived, the design would have taken effect the year following, 1786; but the close of 1785 put an end to his efforts, and within a year and a half his beautiful associate followed him, and our hopes of amusement were doomed to a frightful disappointment: a herd of presumptuous spouting mediocrity invaded their desk, and poor reading was not permitted to die a natural death among us.

The English, I am truly afraid, are fond of the striking, the forcible, and the explosive, — it is a tendency that grows upon them, and will leave in their amusements nothing but pantomine and mechanical contrivance. There have been writers among us who once persuaded Mrs. Siddons to quit the gentle, and I will say the virtuous Shore, for that professing, shameless wanton, Alicia. On the 7th of May she made the experiment, and amazed the distant gods. I cannot but be of opinion that Rowe intended in this lady to exemplify a very favourite lesson, that in woman the departure from chastity is usually the loss of every virtue. Her mind seems framed only for irregular

but brilliant passion, and she attributes her particular feeling to the whole sex. Finding her dearest and most intimate friend dejected and in tears from the consequences of her past life, she chooses as a topic of consolation that she must once have been happy, when a glittering court and its amorous monarch were sighing at her feet. The presentiment of Shore looks to the result of all this mischief, and announces it as at no great distance from her. Alicia has a blessing in reserve for her unhappy friend, a female friendship superior to all the assaults of adversity. The trusting Shore confides to this remaining blessing a casket containing her jewels, and Alicia thus imprecates a curse upon her own conduct:

> "If I not hold her nearer to my soul
> Than every other joy the world can give,
> Let poverty, deformity, and shame,
> Distraction and despair, seize me!"

The scene changes only once; Lord Hastings arrives at Shore's house from the court: not encouraged by her, he has formed designs upon her person; and this friend instantly flies to ruin them both, — in which her headlong passion fully succeeds. Distraction and despair, invoked on her apostasy from the faith pledged to poor Shore, are shown to have seized upon her, but surely it is impossible she should excite the smallest sympathy from the beginning to the end. She blazes

fiercely in rhymed couplets at the close of the violent scenes in which she is engaged, and excites a senseless applause for ravings that disgrace her sex. I never heard any lady but one of the theatre utter a syllable upon the character of Alicia, — in the theatre we endure this fiend because we admire the actress who is her representative, — but we can only think in private upon Shore.

The great actress held on this occasion opinion with Pythagoras. Her soul appeared to be as much at home in the second habitation as it had been in the first, and seemed to have lost every particle of compassion for her former self; in plainer language, nothing whatever of Shore appeared in Alicia. But scream for scream, and distortion for distortion, the Alicia of Mrs. Crawford was many degrees more terrific than that of Mrs. Siddons. The "nodding ruin" of the former was announced in the wild scream of the vulture; and of the whole rant it might be truly said:

"This nothing is much more than matter."

The intellectual dignity of Mrs. Siddons rendered everything of this sort a degradation of her talents. Where in truth could she wish to reign but in the heart or in the judgment? But guilty passion is still passion; and in the scene with Hastings she poured out her tenderness and her confession, her contrition and agony, in tones which more perhaps than half surprised our pity.

From Rowe up to Shakespeare is a distance that no geometry can compute; and yet, what should we now be willing to give to the poet who could produce such a tragedy as "Jane Shore?" But we are grown too familiar with our actual wealth, and accept inferior metal for the sake of variety, though we know it to be intrinsically worthless, and that it cannot last.

Another instance of the taste about the benefit nights of Mrs. Siddons is to be recorded. On the 21st of January, 1788, the tragedy of "King Lear" was revived, in which she herself performed Cordelia, a character of no great power; and it may, therefore, be presumed that her principal object in the choice was to show Mr. Kemble in King Lear. The play acted was Nahum Tate's alteration, who has the fame of contriving the love intrigue between Cordelia and Edgar, without which circumstance, perhaps, the youngest daughter of Lear would hardly have been deemed of sufficient importance to call upon the talents of a great actress. But it is usually dangerous to meddle with the fable of another man's play. Alterations can seldom be so fitted as not to leave some original provision neglected. For instance, upon the frantic desertion of Cordelia by Lear, in the original play, the King of France, feeling himself rich in the possession of her virtues, bears her away with him to that kingdom, — whence she subsequently returns with an army to punish the persecutors

and heal the maladies of her father. Tate keeps her unconnected and in Britain through the play, that he may finally bestow her upon Edgar, without reflecting that, as she had forfeited her third of the kingdom, and must be equally obnoxious with Lear himself to her dog-hearted sisters, there was for her no comfortable or splendid establishment within the verge of the court, and that she must be as certain a wanderer as her father. But in the true style of chivalrous romance — from which the means of existence are to Sancho's astonishment so constantly withdrawn — she, in her unprotected state, attended by her confidante Aranthe, in their poor thin court covering, which scarcely keeps them warm, ventures out in the pitiless storm to find the wretched Lear; and in the fifth act she is discovered in a chamber, we must presume her own, with physicians and armed knights awaiting the result of the means used under her direction for his recovery, in defiance of the sovereign prohibition making it death to relieve him. And all this inconsistency and absurdity is brought upon us, that Cordelia, in the night and the storm, may be seized by the emissaries of Edmund, delivered by the seeming lunatic Edgar, who is caressed by her as the best and dearest of men, and in his beggar's garb receives that return of affection which had been refused to his happier hour.

I do not mean to say that such a scene would be objectionable, if it would naturally work with

the business of the play; for though it breaks in upon the filial singleness of Cordelia's mind, and the lover takes his turn to reign with the father there, yet female interest should be had for our audiences if it can be admitted without serious injury to the work. Kent here, when he determined himself upon his course, might have bestowed upon Cordelia the possession of his land and the use of his fortune; but this resource should have been made known to us, which it is not in the play as acted by Mr. Kemble.

There is one part of Tate's alteration which every reader will approve: he has made the unnatural daughters profligate and oppressive sovereigns.

> "The riots of these proud imperial sisters
> Already have impos'd the galling yoke
> Of taxes, and hard impositions, on
> The drudging peasant's neck, who bellows out
> His loud complaints in vain. Triumphant queens!
> With what assurance do they tread the crowd!"

To be sure Edmund, although their gallant, speaks of them as if he were at least a reprover of their vices; but as everything that Tate does must be more or less inconsistent, the lover not only is disposed to second their riots, but would reign himself precisely in the same outrageous manner! Having immediately after this speech received *billets-doux* from the two sisters, he nat-

urally thinks of going through the family, and violating Cordelia in the storm. But it is really shocking to see the inventions of Shakespeare thus placed at the mercy of Bedlam and the Mint, in which latter asylum for indolent sottish imbecility Tate dozed away much of his existence. The Church may owe him something, for he translated the Psalms in conjunction with Doctor Brady; but his new version of "Lear" should neither be sung nor said on any stage in Christendom.

For the just limits of stage innovation the reader may consult the elder Colman's alteration of this play for Powell. In compliance with the general taste, he has preserved both Lear and Cordelia, without disturbing her union with the King of France, and has retained nothing of Tate but the animating speech of Cordelia which follows the mental recovery of her father in the fifth act. It is proper to observe that Mrs. Siddons gave this with a filial tenderness, an ardour, and a piety highly impressive. It closes a very pathetic scene by bringing down that vehemence of applause that a performer must have to keep him from being dissatisfied with his own effects, and flat in spirit from the coldness of the house.

The money receipt at the door, I mean reckoning every admission at the proper rate, was £347 10*s*., almost equal to the famous night of "Macbeth," the greatest that Drury Lane Theatre had ever known. The presents, it is probable, declined

in their amount. In the advance toward the highest fame, the growing splendour of the actress increases our respect and diminishes our zeal. Patronage is protection, and to that acknowledged genius becomes superior, — there is an apprehension of offence if more is tendered than the proper consideration for the box we occupy.

In another work I have noticed Mrs. Cowley's "Fate of Sparta," a tragedy in which Mrs. Siddons acted the part of Chelonice. I presume everything to have been done for it that the subject admitted, — its success, for modern tragedy, was beyond the usual measure, though Mr. Kemble sunk under the part of Cleombrotus. Mrs. Cowley had supplied Mrs. Siddons with an epilogue exactly suited to the taste of the stage professor; that is, quite personal, and seducing and ensuring the claps of the audience. For a taste, and a future model together, —

"Your hands they ask — such thunders do not fright —
Repeat the peal once more — and then, good night."

Mr. Kemble took his annual night on the 13th of March, and as a novelty gave "Katharine and Petruchio," the wrangling pair by Mrs. Siddons and himself. Perhaps it was never better acted, if you could get over the conviction that such a physiognomy as that of the actress never could belong to a termagant; and that if the bent of mind had once been given, it would not have been

possible for the teasing, violent, and harassing discipline of Petruchio to have tamed down such a woman to so absurd an obedience to his pleasure. Of a petulant spoiled girl the transformation might be credited. The incidents are farcical, and the whip and the crockery make noise enough for the joke's sake; but there never could be an atom of farce in the composition of Mrs. Siddons, though her name might always be useful, "set it to what point you would."

The hopes of man are subject to failure when security is rendered the most probable. The last season and the present offer two striking examples. Captain Jephson and his friends at the castle had so distinguished themselves in the early support of Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, that, with his great talent to bear up their exertions, "Julia" might have reckoned upon a triumphant and durable existence on the London stage. The illness of Mr. Kemble destroyed her.

Mr. Greatheed might have equally relied upon the success of his "Regent." He had written a part for Mr. Kemble quite up to his wishes, and in all probability fashioned by his advice; and the heroine Dianora was in the hands of Mrs. Siddons, who in the outset of life had resided with the Greatheed family, whose subsequent celebrity had been welcomed by their warmest friendship, and who must have had peculiar pleasure in returning one description of protection for another. But

her health unluckily failed her after the second night, and the run of the piece — a mighty matter — was unfortunately checked.

The interest of "The Regent" is of the true Spanish cast. Inflexible design, dark and deadly means, and that tyranny exercised upon the maternal bosom which only shows that it contends in vain against the strongest principle in female nature. The husband, supposed to be murdered, survives to return at the critical moment, and redeem his wife and child from the fierce grasp of the Regent. Kemble in the present play looked like one of those grand and terrible beings who desolated Spanish America, — a class of men to be found, I would fain hope, only under peculiar excitements in any nation.

I will not refuse myself the pleasure of noticing that Mr. Greatheed seems to have strongly felt the characteristic fulness and power of Shakespeare's soliloquies. The following ruminations of Manuel remind the reader of his Richard, and are no feeble rivals of his nervous diction:

"My crime is past, — and, if there shall be judgment,
Will damn me certain: — then, be this my heaven.
But who, lynx-ey'd, has peer'd beyond the grave,
And view'd that phœnix immortality?
No — all may crumble in sepulchral night,
And then have I the better of the game,
Dost thou exist, or is thy being null,
Thou whom I sent to learn these mysteries?

If thou art blessed, I shall be a demon;
Therefore I hope thine essence is no more."

When we know, too, that this was a first play, and see how at times he could attain the just medium between tumour and flatness, we may regret that he did not pursue the obvious bent of his genius, and adorn at least his own times with compositions which at least reminded us by an emulous spirit of our former glories. He dedicated "The Regent" to Mrs. Siddons. Mr. Greatheed was assailed by all the outrageous and rancorous wantonness of criticism; but he was a gentleman, and continued silent.

For her second night this season Mrs. Siddons took the masterwork of Dryden, "All for Love," and performed his Cleopatra. The distinction which I should make between the queens of Shakespeare and Dryden is that the one displays the cause and the other the effect. Everything is said by Dryden that can describe unbounded passion — that is done in Shakespeare which alone can keep it without diminution; his Cleopatra is a character of infinite variety.

Dryden appears to me to have exhausted himself in all the artifices of poetical embellishment. His play is luxuriant in the happiest combinations of language. Nor does he confine the charm to the highest personages. I know not that there is anything better than the following, put into the mouth of Alexas:

"Believe me, madam, Antony is yours;
His heart was never lost, but started off
To jealousy, love's last retreat and covert,
Where it lies hid in shades, watchful in silence,
And listening for the sound that calls it back."

One part of his subject was beyond his power: the interview which he was tempted to write between the proud Egyptian charmer and Octavia, the sister of Cæsar and the wife of Antony. It is inconceivably vulgar; for their passions are too vehement to allow of the temperaments of their rank. The best sentence of their rival malice is with Cleopatra, —

"Your lord, the man who serves me, is a Roman."

Octavia is once even indecent. It is, I have no doubt, the worst scene in the play, and ends its third act.

I never found that the audience sympathised very strongly with Cleopatra. Antony's passion for her is the weakness of a hero, and her love for him is not the virtue of either her sex or condition. She is, I think, barely endured, for she does not attempt to render her error respectable by her remorse.

Shakespeare, who better understood, or more closely adhered to nature, has represented Cleopatra as capricious as alluring, and as facile as fond. She can tease the being whom she loves, and betray the hero whom she cannot survive.

That Mrs. Siddons did everything that could be desired for the Cleopatra of "All for Love" is readily granted. She was a being for whom the world indeed might seem "well lost." But from the commanding style of her features and the dignity of her person the notion of frailty was visually banished; she seems always to be superior to her condition. The daring atrocity of crime was, however, her own. She could completely unsex herself as Lady Macbeth, and repel the scorns of the world in Calista; but the pageant of romance, the Cleopatra of Dryden, had nothing that suited her, and did not range among her acting parts.

Of Shakespeare's superior genius the world has heard enough, though perhaps hardly yet felt sufficiently; but of his superior judgment little, indeed, has been said. Dryden has gone over the famous passage of the Cydnus, and so fertile was his fancy that he has left a rival description of much beauty; but he lost the great point, that is, to show the magic of his Egyptian by her effects. In Dryden, Antony himself describes this gorgeous scene to the blushing Dolabella. In Shakespeare, the whole world is gone to gaze on Cleopatra, and the master of it,

> "Enthron'd i' the market place did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air."

This is beyond all the silken streamers and the cloth of gold, the seeming Cupids and Nereids,

and the love-sick winds that wafted the imperial beauty; or rather it describes the scene more impressively than the highly apposite terms chosen by either poet. It is wiser frequently to suggest to the imagination than to satiate it. As these passages stand in the plays, Dryden's convinces us of the dotage only of Antony, Shakespeare's of the perfect attraction of Cleopatra. In the first, his fondness seems to have embellished her voyage; in the second, he is rendered a nullity by it, and, but that he is named by the poet, would have been forgotten by us, as he was by the people.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was certainly a point of great importance to Mrs. Siddons that her brother, Mr. Kemble, should at all events be the stage-manager of Drury Lane Theatre, and that for reasons which equally affected her family and her fame. How her fame itself was dependent upon such an arrangement shall be shown. Perhaps no actress ever stood so strongly alone as Mrs. Siddons. The tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth repetition of many of her characters, hackneyed as they had previously been for half a century by every actress worthy of the name, had still an attraction in her powers of the most respectable and profitable kind. Some of them, it is true, became a little the worse for wear; but, generally speaking, what had first charmed her audiences preserved their affection beyond the useless and hopeless trials of what novelty might produce.

The genius of the age was certainly not of a dramatic cast; it supplied nothing that could be even wished to survive beyond the ninth representation, when the poet commonly found that two benefits might have been more profitable to him

than three. But it was a somewhat rare occurrence to reach that consummate number of the muses. There was in fact, therefore, no increase to her list of parts, and an endless sameness, it might be foreseen, would wear out alike the energy of the actress and the attention of the town.

The retirement of Smith from the stage was followed by that of King from the management, if management that could be called which had no feature of the function but its name. He describes himself as having by no written agreement the power either to accept or reject any new dramatic work; to engage, encourage, or discharge any one performer; nor to order the refitting of a single article in a worn-out wardrobe. To our still greater surprise, he adds that he had not even the wish to possess privileges supposed to reside exclusively in the proprietors of the concern. How he had been tempted to lend himself, his talent, his consideration, to the servile duties that could alone remain to his situation, he has not explained; but he might receive occasional promises, which were made only to pacify and be forgotten; and, indeed, hope that the exigency of the case would at last bestow what the most indolent love of power was so loath to relinquish.

In such effusions of spleen the grievance most felt is commonly undeclared, and I cannot but suppose the feelings of a comic actor somewhat hurt at the ascendency of tragedy, and his perception

that the actual power of Mr. Kemble and his sister in the theatre must render him now an absolute cipher in the concern. The comedians who had adhered to him through life were withdrawing fast from his standard; and the school of Garrick must shortly submit to other masters than those who had presided in its various classes. He knew, I conceive, that his retirement made way for Mr. Kemble's certain appointment.

Upon the peculiar studies and accomplishments of Mr. Kemble enough has been said in the author's "Memoirs" of his late friend; it is here only necessary to show how they eventually aided the impression even of Mrs. Siddons herself. In his system of management Mr. Garrick was certainly the model followed by Mr. Kemble. They both, for the same reason, built principally upon Shakespeare, and looked to his characters as the materials of which their own consequence was to be composed. The difference between these great actors was, that Garrick (as indeed he might well do) depended more upon himself; and with respect to the combination of other great talents with his own, or the minor embellishments proceeding from the utmost attention to the whole cast of the play, a picturesque costume as to the dresses, and scenery of reasonable accuracy, he was careless, perhaps disdainful; or, as he had decided upon a certain scale of expense which was not to be exceeded, he employed his scene painters and his

tailors religiously upon the festivals of Christmas and Easter, and left the drama, plainly and decently got up, to the genius of the poet and the actor.

Mr. Kemble, with respect to our dramatic authors, had something of the feeling of a commentator; he was born for accuracy, and was convinced that the very text spoken upon our stages needed the most careful revision; as we grew accustomed to our elder language by the frequent republication of Shakespeare, the numberless substitutions of familiar for obsolete expressions were now to be struck out, and our great poet upon the stage rendered more strictly like his own words in the closet. He thought, in a word, that the stage should evince a proper attention to the prevailing studies of the times. If this was his opinion as to the language of our plays, he considered the mode in which they were exhibited still more open to improvement. Too many and too considerable demands were made upon the imagination of the spectators "to piece out with their thoughts" the imperfections of the stage. He saw no reason why the representation in the seeming magnificence of the action should yield to the reality, and that it should be true as well as splendid was a principle of illusion which was likely by its air of learning to recommend show itself to such as affect to despise it unless it has the *verd antique* about it accurately coloured.

The older notion as tc acting was that the power of the actor, "the bright metal on a sullen ground," was all-sufficient, and needed not the aid of ornament; everything subordinate, as it could make little effect, it was policy to slur over. Kemble, on the contrary, looking to a larger field of exertion and more ample means, made the whole so perfect and splendid and interesting that the greatest talents alone could be borne with in the higher characters of the drama. He consequently established the ascendency of himself and his sister by the very accompaniments that would have rendered feebler merits contemptible.

When, therefore, he had accepted the management of Drury Lane Theatre he bent every faculty he possessed to improve stage representation. By the good taste of his alterations of the plays themselves, the fitness of the performers for the parts allotted to them, and the knowledge that now regulated the dresses, the properties, and the scenery of his revivals, a management that was assailed at times by puny ridicule, and often thwarted by the treasury as to supplies, and performers from a natural desire after eminence, became really an era in the art, — so excellent as absolutely to admit of no subsequent improvement. He felt that the style of his own acting was gaining ground upon ancient prejudices; and he never doubted for a moment that he should ultimately establish the grand and poetic, the *beau idéal*, as the standard

of art among us. To second all his designs he had the finest tragic actress in the world, who began to feel that either novelty must be provided, or a novel gloss be given to the old, or her attraction must at length decline. Shakespeare had still some demands unsatisfied upon her. Lady Macbeth had enchanted with spells more potent than ever muttered over the cauldron of the witches, and the Roman matron promised to add a distinctive feature to her past achievements, while Queen Katharine tempted her with the promise of more true majesty, mental dignity, and persistive virtue than were ever combined to constitute female excellence in the imagination of man. She had but one abatement to her triumph, — that it could never now be witnessed by her admirer, Doctor Johnson.

It might be imagined that some impediments stood in the way of this ascendency of the tragic muse. With the vivacity of a comic writer, Mr. Sheridan had done his utmost to cover the business and the manners of tragedy with ridicule, and he had levelled his satire, not, like the authors of "The Rehearsal," at the tragedies then in vogue, but at the resorts of all tragedy; and "The Critic" seems in some few points but little to regard the prescriptive veneration attached to the tragedies of a distant age. When, in addition to all this, he invents the absurdity he cannot find, and ascribes his monstrous nonsense to a man of consummate ability, namely Puff, it is quite clear his

attack is levelled rather at the composition than the writer; and that he would thus indirectly recommend that style of entertainment to which his own particular genius inclined him.

It is not my intention here to enter into an examination of Mr. Sheridan's dramatic talents. When a writer has produced plays of brilliant and lasting reputation, it would be ungenerous to assemble all the originals of his characters and trace his situations to their source; to examine how a very common thought is rendered pungent, and the face of novelty bestowed upon a very ancient simile or sarcasm. A late publication [1] has shown this surprising man, whose name among us was almost synonymous to indolent genius, to have been the most pertinacious and elaborate polisher of points of dialogue that probably ever existed; to have always been storing up a magazine of figure and illustration, to be used as occasion might demand; and even to watch that occasion with solicitude, or force it by address, when the painful result of much reflection and study was to fall from him as the meteor of the moment, and dazzle his hearers by a kind of mental wonder, the quickness of whose production was only equalled by the brilliancy of its point.

If the author of "The School for Scandal" approached Congreve in the stream of wit characteristic of both, there was another excellence,

[1] Moore's "Life of Sheridan."

one of art, in which he was quite equal to his great master; I mean the suiting the sentence exactly to the organ, and being sure of the fancy and the judgment, taking care that the rhythm should please as much almost as the reason or the wit, and the ear anticipate the triumph of the appeal to the understanding; sentences written to be spoken tried upon the tuneful tongue of the writer, and thus never suffered to hang upon that of the actor. The declamation of Mr. Sheridan had always this pointed and musical character; and when he quoted the rebuke to Mammon in Spenser, during his famous speech in Westminster Hall, a kind of audible surprise was felt that he should recite poetry so finely; but the prose of his whole life was to the full as metrical as even the verse of Spenser.[1]

[1] The reader might with some reason complain if I left him to his own search as to the passage quoted by this great orator. Indeed it was combined from two distant stanzas in the seventh canto of the second book of the "Faerie Queene." As he spoke the lines they seemed closely connected:

"Mammon, said he, thy godhead's vaunt is vaine,
And idle offers of thy golden fee;
To them that covet such eye-glutting gaine
Proffer thy giftes, and fitter servaunts entertaine.
Another bliss before mine eyes I place,
Another happiness, another end,
And to be lord of those that riches have,
Then them to have my selfe, and be their servile sclave."

In this manner did he choose to repel the assertions of Mr. Hastings's friends that the governor-general had never been ava-

That Mr. Sheridan could have long continued to supply even such dialogue as distinguishes his "School for Scandal" and the first act of his "Critic" I feel no difficulty to admit; but I am rather disposed to think his mind not so affluent in character nor so inventive of dramatic business as would be demanded for any long reign of a comic writer. He does not seem to have discerned much of what constitutes character, — his personages have commonly been seen before, if not dressed with equal neatness or elegance. The artist, I confess, appears always before me. It is the attribute of genius to conceal all labour. Not to mention him with whom there can be no comparison, Mr. Sheridan could not have gathered the

ricious, and, with all the treasures of the East at his disposal, had made no provision for himself or family, and that he was now absolutely a poor man.

It was on the present occasion that I saw the historian Gibbon in the managers' box. Sheridan seized the opportunity to combine the "luminous page of the philosopher with the correct periods of Tacitus;" and Mr. Gibbon on the occasion says, "Nor could I hear without emotion the personal compliment which he paid me in the presence of the British nation."

On this trial I saw Burke sensibly touched by a compliment from the third counsel for Mr. Hastings, Mr. Dallas. The learned advocate said of the great manager that, "if he had been cast into the times of Zenobia, he would have been found, like Longinus in the train of his ungrateful mistress, less concerned at the fate which awaited him than at the weakness by which she had sacrificed the noblest of her friends." To this, in the politest manner, Mr. Burke audibly said, "Very well indeed, sir."

endless train of humours which crowded about the discernment of Molière. Besides that he always reminds you of some predecessor, there is little absolute nature even in his finest scenes. More merriment has seldom been produced than we find in his "Rivals," but the characters are violently overcharged. The vocabulary of Mrs. Malaprop is full of expressions so removed from ordinary use that she must have stumbled upon more meaning even in the search of her terms. Acres is not to be credited any more than Sir Anthony Absolute; they are, however, diverting absurdities beyond the latitude of nature, who yet, it must be confessed, —

"Showers with copious hand."

But whatever might have been the result of a steady application to the drama on the part of Mr. Sheridan, he had determined to run the greater course as a politician, and eclipse even his celebrity as a dramatic writer by his fame as an orator. And, strange as it may be to say it, he succeeded; at least thus far, that he impressed those who heard him in Westminster Hall that they had then witnessed the grandest display of talent of ancient or modern times. And, perhaps, so large an assembly as that which concurred in this opinion could not be entirely deceived. Yet I may be permitted to think that he did wisely in authentically trusting it only to the ear. The os-

tentation and boldness of its figures, its affectation of displaying all the knowledge that he must have painfully gathered together, its florid style, its eternal exclamation and appeals to violated nature and morals, — all bore too much of the character of Irish oratory, and would have looked in the closet to the dispassionate reader timid and artificial. I heard Mr. Burke's fine summing up, and I found there the full dignity of long-treasured wisdom, an imagination rich but not gaudy, and at times invested with an almost prophetic awfulness, as it pictured forth the effects of successful guilt. The grave and masterly figure of Justice with which he solemnly closed his appeal to the judges of Mr. Hastings was, in my judgment, infinitely beyond the more theatrical images of Sheridan.

The constant demands of the House of Commons upon him occupied nearly all his time; and, however tempting the reputation or the profits of the stage might be to a man of genius who had determined on political independence, however ill-inclined he might be to see his theatre in possession of any other comic writer, he could hardly hope for sufficient leisure to extend very considerably his own dramatic productions. He therefore listened with pleasure to the scheme of management proposed to him by Mr. Kemble; who, for a different reason, and with quite another sort of taste, was little disposed to encourage the

modern drama. Bestowing a care so reverential upon the elder drama, and ensuring its attraction by the expense with which it was embellished, made it almost an act of presumption in any writer of our own day to offer his inventions in the region devoted to the great masters of the art. The payments to authors, too, would be slender — who sometimes were well remunerated for a very fugitive production — while such moneys expended in dress and scenery and decoration remained permanent properties in the theatre, which, it has been already stated, had become rather mean in its imitations of the splendour of past times. The new manager, therefore, entered upon his task with full reliance upon his own plans; and little apprehensive, perhaps, then, that he should ever be thwarted in his designs, and reduced to besiege the treasury for the means of replenishing its own coffers. He started, however, with considerably more actual power than King had ever possessed, and his sister's strength might be calculated as his own.

In the early part of the summer of 1788, an event occurred of the deepest moment to the nation. I allude to the late king's alarming indisposition, of which the first symptoms indicated nothing beyond bilious fever; and accordingly, Sir George Baker was inclined to keep his Majesty from the hurry to which he would be exposed by going to town, and recommended that he should

remain at Kew until the complaint was quite removed. His Majesty's physicians, however, thought it advisable to try the effect of the mineral waters at Cheltenham: the king unfortunately derived little or no benefit from the springs, and returned on the 16th of August to Windsor. Soon after this symptoms of mental aberration appeared, which called for the solemn attention of the legislature of the country.

The reason for noticing that event in this place is, that the subject of these "Memoirs" became among the very earliest to perceive that the royal mind was somewhat unsettled. The attention paid by his Majesty to the great actress was not confined to the public exhibition of her talents, — he was a professed admirer of her manners in private life, and the royal family saw her frequently at Buckingham House and at Windsor.

His Majesty's conversation always expressed the gracious feeling of his mind, and his wish to promote the interests of herself and her family. However, on one occasion the king put into her hands a sheet of paper merely subscribed with his name, intended, it may be presumed, to afford the opportunity to Mrs. Siddons of pledging the royal signature to any provision of a pecuniary nature which might be most agreeable to the actress herself. This paper, with the discretion that was suited to the circumstance itself, and which was so characteristic of Mrs. Siddons, she, I was assured, delivered

into the hand of the queen, upon whom conduct so delicate and dignified was not likely to be lost.

Mr. Kemble, I think, told me that her Majesty was very pointed in the expression of her approbation at the time; and it may be readily believed that no individual among the various classes of the king's subjects looked with more solicitude to the progress of his Majesty's disorder, nor more sincerely rejoiced in his recovery, than the lady whom, even in his infirmity, he had intended to render as independent as she was meritorious.

On the 25th of November, 1788, in obedience, as we may state it, to the decision of Doctor Johnson, Mrs. Siddons acted Shakespeare's Queen Katharine in "Henry the Eighth," which was carefully revived by Mr. Kemble, and became from that night one of the most attractive pieces that the stage has ever known. The character of Katharine is historical rather than dramatic; the poet has versified the chronicler, and has added but little, except the numbers of his art, to the very expressions of Henry's high-souled queen. I never on any occasion beheld our admirable actress more impressed with the matron dignity that was expected from her, and never were the highest hopes of her friends crowned with more perfect satisfaction. Yet there is but slender scope for passion. The situation absorbs the woman. The object of Katharine is to do nothing that may compromise her own rights or those of her

daughter; nothing unworthy of the exalted stock she came from, or the high tone to which that birth had necessarily carried the sense of all her duties. Her place in council is admirably sustained; she is the soul of moderation, — her candour pierces through the sophistry of exaggeration, and she looks with the keenness of an accusing angel into the oppressions of arrogant authority.

The first entrance of Mrs. Siddons was in the second scene of the first act. It is the council-chamber, where the king appears to have been excited by Wolsey against the Duke of Buckingham, and they are upon the point of making his accuser repeat the treasons with which he has been charged, when Sir Henry Guildford without calls, "Room for the queen" — and she enters, her page bearing a cushion before her, which, having placed, she kneels to the king, and, after the salutations have been exchanged, proceeds to open the gracious object on which she came, — to relieve the commons from sundry grievous exactions, which she, in fact, charges upon Wolsey. The minister avails himself of the protest against more imputation than attaches to his mere voice in the measure of a Cabinet council. "I know but of a single part." The temperate dignity of the reply was enchantingly uttered:

> "*Queen.* No, my lord,
> You know no more than others; but you frame
> Things, that are known alike."

It was from that moment obvious that she would here excel any level speaking that she had ever delivered upon the stage. The dignity of her figure, admirably dressed, the intelligence of her look, and the graceful composure of her gesture have never been paralleled.

The first allusion to the Duke of Buckingham was the gentle concern of one who did not take accusation for conviction. When the accuser adds to his charge of treason one that he vowed revenge upon the cardinal, Wolsey presses that point stronger than a good or a great man would have done:

> "To your high person
> His will is most malignant; and it stretches
> Beyond you — to your friends."

It is delightful to me to recall the tone of the queen's rebuke:

> "*Queen.* My learn'd lord cardinal,
> Deliver all with charity."

As brave as generous, she follows this with a shuddering caution to the discarded servant who came forward to accuse his great master:

> "Take good heed
> You charge not in your spleen a noble person,
> And spoil your nobler soul; I say — take heed."

The actress far outstripped here all the majestic energy which I have heard in the grandest court

that ever assembled.[1] Upon Wolsey's triumph in the strength of the fellow's accusations, and his retort upon the queen's lenity, equally beautiful was the "Heaven mend all!" with which she concludes.

The scene in the second act, called her trial, — a trial of nothing but the patience of the queen, — had the most intense interest; it was perfectly delusive. The address to the king made its way to the heart by satisfying the judgment. But upon Wolsey's insulting her with the "integrity and learning" assembled to plead for her in the king's dominions against his own passions — the commanding air, look, and tone with which she called up her enemy excited a delightful astonishment. There is no hint in Shakespeare of any rising of Campeius when she utters the words "Lord Cardinal;" and then the waving him aside for the other cardinal present, Wolsey, —

"To you I speak."

And I do not know whether this double action and division of the address originated with Mrs. Siddons or not. I incline to think it did; for though it looked more in the subtle style of her brother's understanding than what I will call the more manly plainness of her own, yet the action with which it

[1] If the reader should suspect that I may here refer to the manner of Lord Thurlow, at the trial of Mr. Hastings in Westminster Hall, he will do me no injustice.

was accompanied, the sway and balance of the figure, offered a charm to the spectator which the pencil fortunately did not lose; though my young friend who painted it perished from neglect when he was meditating greater things than what I call the most effective scene that was ever transferred from the stage to the canvas.

"My drops of tears
I'll turn to sparks of fire"—

expressions as vivid as the look of the actress by which that change was actually produced. The rest of this admirable scene was sustained with such true grandeur that upon her exit it was in truth quite time to break up the council, for the king and his favourite vindicated each other with very little attention from the audience.

Although we see nothing more of Katharine till she is at Kimbolton, and such is the rapid course of the action that Wolsey's disgrace, journey, and death all occur before the fourth act, yet the spectator is sufficiently led through the successive events, and attends the last illness of the queen fully prepared for the awful close of her sublime character. The great woman whose progress I trace with equal veneration and regret (veneration for its powerful truth, and regret that it can be seen no more) acted this display of languor that never wearied with inimitable majesty. I can hardly bring myself to think the Lady Macbeth

a greater effort: one more perfect I am sure it was not. The imagination will naturally let itself loose to consider what Shakespeare himself would have thought of such an exhibition. Though he wrote such characters for men, he must think of all the peculiar graces of woman; and for an elevated conception of female dignity he had only to contemplate the "lion port and awe-commanding face" of Elizabeth, who had many of his plays acted at court. If the poet really designed to exhibit "Henry the Eighth" before Elizabeth, he must have greatly complimented her mind when he trusted her with so fascinating a picture of the queen supplanted by her own unfortunate mother. Yet the great Eliza is said to have shown a marked indifference to her mother's memory, and to have buried all the odious qualities of her father, and his injurious conduct to herself, under the flattering throne which she derived from him.

"O hard condition,
Twin-born with greatness!"

I cannot omit to notice the very characteristic manner in which the Defender of the Faith and author of its rejection was performed by Palmer; his towering figure, fair complexion, and explosive manner gave an absolute facsimile of Harry. He had enough of tragedy about him to keep his comedy from being ludicrous: the importance of the king and the awe which

it inspired have occasionally suffered in other hands.

The time of Wolsey was not yet arrived. Bensley was impressive, but he was so decided a mannerist that the cardinal frequently reminded his hearers of the gallant conspirator against the state of Venice, and some violent anachronism seemed to have promoted the rebel Pierre from the wheel to the cross, which Wolsey, alas, proudly had borne before him.

As a matter of stage convenience Mr. Kemble joined the two characters of Cromwell and Griffith together; but the attachment of the former to his great master, Wolsey, would keep him at a great distance from the chance of ever attending Queen Katharine; he had his fortune to make at court, and knew well the peril of seeking those who are out of favour.

The 7th of February, 1789, exhibited Mrs. Siddons as the Roman mother of Kemble in "Coriolanus." Volumnia was evidently a great favourite with Shakespeare; he has painted that heroic mould in a manner the most natural and masterly. To use the language of another admirable writer, she has not parted with the "remains of that fierce spirit which sullied with barbarism the lofty and romantic courtesy of ancient manners." She delights to contemplate the warrior crimsoned in the blood of his enemy — sees his mailed hand wiping his bleeding brows, and thinks

that stain more becoming to a man than the golden lacquer upon his trophy. She does herself full justice too. She is a daughter of the Queen of Nations, and can speak thus truly to Coriolanus:

> "Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me;
> But owe thy pride thyself."

As I sat revolving the figure, the expression, and the voice of the noble representative of Volumnia; brought before my imagination again the simple resorts of headdress by which her beautiful and noble face was made to pass for that of the mother of Kemble without demur; when, in running over, in a rather tenacious memory, the free and various dialogue in which she mingles, I had again in my ear the perfect tones of that eloquence always suited to the occasion, I could not help a smile of either contempt or pity at the affected disdain of La Harpe for everything that would have rendered his "Coriolan" natural and interesting. To hear him quote the dictum of his oracle, Voltaire, — "that Coriolanus, condemned at Rome in the first act, received by the Volscians in the third, and besieging Rome in the fourth, constituted in fact three tragedies." Then, to preserve any interest at all, feeling bold enough to venture so far from the unity of place as to open his own third act in the camp of the Volscians, being careful, however, in the scenery to show a miniature of Rome hanging up in the dis-

tance — as if, when he had once led his spectators from the place they were first shown, he might not as well have transferred them to Antium, better known to an audience by Shakespeare's exclamation, "A goodly city is this Antium," than the minikin Rome in the distance could be from the camp of the Volscians.

I read over his character of Veturie, the mother of Coriolan, and rejoiced that Mrs. Siddons had been delivered from the sameness of her patriotic declamations, and the few points of stage trickery which are the only substitutes for the emotions of humanity. I will turn a few of these fine things into verse, at least as good as that they came from:

"*Corio.* Your Roman firmness now must comfort you.
Vetur. I am a mother only.
Corio. Nay, not now,
Since you have lost your son.
Vetur. How? I have lost him!
Corio. So Rome decides. Is she not absolute?
Vetur. Can Rome efface that sacred character?
Corio. 'Twas of a Roman that you were the mother; —
And I am one no longer.
Vetur. Who? Marcius, thou!"

The climax of all this dovetailing absurdity is that Veturia has been fully informed of all that happened in the Forum before the entrance of Coriolanus, and her first speech to her son ac-

quaints him that she has heard of his banishment; but the literary fencing match was to be played out all the same in this region of grandeur, and nature, and *bon sens*, and *bon goût*.

La Harpe was once accused of having trafficked a little with Shakespeare in his own third act; but the tutor of Alexander the Russ rather indignantly vindicated his good sense and good taste from such an aspersion by immediately quoting from "Plutarque, Vertot, and Tite-Live;" from the first of whom Shakespeare had drawn the materials which had been common to them both.

I have never known why our great poet changed the name of Coriolanus's mother to that of his wife, namely, Volumnia, instead of Veturia, her real appellation. La Harpe informs us that an Abbé Abeille, in treating this subject, has knotted it all up into five acts of amorous intrigue, where Coriolanus and Aufidius play at cross purposes, or rather partners; the Roman being beloved by a certain Camilla, sister to Aufidius — he himself being a follower of Virgilia, who is beloved by Coriolanus. Here we have the name given by Shakespeare to the wife of the great patrician. Is it likely that this French bee had been buzzing among the sweets of Shakespeare, and brought away only the name of one of his flowrets instead of the honey?

I should quote the whole of the character of Volumnia were I to detail all the charms with

which Siddons adorned her. Her playful courage with the women in the outset; the welcome of her son with the peculiar —

"What is't? Coriolanus must I call thee?"

The scene after his contest with the tribunes, and that delightful —

"O, Sir, Sir, Sir,
I would have had you put your power well on,
Before you had worn it out."

And the rejoinder, in the key of her son's "Let them hang," —

"Ay, and burn too."

The "He must and will" go to the market-place, and the relaxing of her maternal character into familiarity, —

"Pr'ythee now, say you will, and go about it."

And the moodiness with which she seemed to value his consent at nothing because it had been given with no greater readiness, —

"Do your will. [*Exit.*]"

The remainder of Volumnia in the fifth act is highly characteristic as Shakespeare left it. Kemble admitted some of Thomson's dialogue in the French taste, *e.g.*, —

"Rome by thy aid is sav'd — but thy son lost."

To which the mother replies, as the whole parterre of Paris would have done, —

> "He never can be lost who saves his country."

But the greater poet had other arts of elevating a character than by making it the strutting declaimer of patriotic conundrums. Hear him, in the mouth of Coriolanus, unfold the great principle of filial duty to the mother who best of all the world deserved it:

> "*Col.* My mother bows;
> As if Olympus to a molehill should
> In supplication nod."

How beautiful is the subsequent retort of Volumnia upon this feeling, as if she had heard him express it, —

> "There is no man in the world
> More bound to his mother; yet here he lets me prate
> Like one i' the stocks."

And what follows in a strain of divine simplicity and pathos, —

> "When she, poor hen! fond of no second brood,
> Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home."

And equally great the reproach, —

> "This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
> His wife is in Corioli, and his child
> Like him by chance."

And the determination of the Roman matron, so suitable to her true dignity :

> "I am hush'd until our city be on fire,
> And then I'll speak a little."

When an author can write in this exquisitely natural strain, and almost forget himself and his luxuriant art to be the true organ only of character, passion, and business, he achieves the *ne ultra* of dramatic power, and holds up a mirror, stained by no mist of fashion, that clearly reflects the unquestionable features of man. To be worthy to study such a poet is no slight commendation — to display him, as Mrs. Siddons did his Lady Macbeth, Katharine, and Volumnia, is a fame that I have endeavoured at least to fix and delineate.

It is sometimes rather strange in the eye of the critic to see the possessor of the greatest talent disposed to waste it upon ungracious materials ; and, in revivng the dead, stumbling upon subjects who were never worthy of existence. For her night, the 16th of February, Mrs. Siddons put up "The Law of Lombardy" and the farce of "Lethe." This was what Cowper would have called —

> "Undesign'd severity, that glanc'd ;"

for the fine lady of the farce was as much forgotten as the princess of the tragedy. That Mrs. Clive might have exhibited Mrs. Riot, and de-

lighted her audience, I can readily suppose; she might, not only with impunity, but with something like the vulgar ignorance of worn-out affectations, have uttered the jargon of Mrs. Malaprop. But to hear from Mrs. Siddons of *Serbeerus* and *Plutus*, and the *internal* world — of *Goats* and *Vandils*, and of the waterman *Scarroon*, and of the *quincettence* and *emptity* of a fine lady, and her *anecdote* for the vapours, — why, truly, one is hurt to think that such a man as Garrick should imagine he was doing anything when he wrote nonsense so detestable; and still more so that such a woman as Mrs. Siddons did not disdain to pollute her lips with language that disgraced her fine articulation as much as its meaning did her understanding. If she was not generous enough to stay away, I suppose Mrs. Jordan might be the only person who could smile at such an attempt.

Lord Chalkstone and his Bowman are the first sketches of Ogleby and Canton, made out, as the painters say, by Colman the elder, and destined to the longest possible period of modern comedy, — for our best are not, I think, immortal, like the comedies or tragedies of Shakespeare.

The subject of Mary Queen of Scots is so interesting in history, whatever be the opinions of the historian, that we are not surprised to see a tedious confinement, ended only by the axe, become the business of the tragic poet; and a single scene of interest, not very dramatic, be yet

sufficient to render five acts endurable, though they should never be popular. The Duke of Wharton left an unfinished "Mary;" and Mr. St. John, the brother of Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, was fortunate enough to finish a tragedy upon that subject, which was produced in March, 1789, by Mrs. Siddons, and, however feeble from the charms of the heroine and those of her representative, acted several times. The inherent difficulty of this story to an Englishman is the attention demanded by the rival queens; and notwithstanding the solid quartos and the crowding octavos which encumber our shelves with her vindication, Mary of Scotland is not quite the person whom I should select to blight the fame of our glorious Elizabeth. If your pathos spring from the sufferings of the Scottish queen, you can view in her rival little more than a vain and cruel persecutor; or a sovereign who, however arbitrary, in this case is the dupe of her ministers, and the innocent instrument by which the ruin of her dear kinswoman is accomplished. But, however congested, it will always be heavy in the performance, unless the piece be animated by scenes of that courtly Billingsgate with which Schiller has marked the interview of his Mary and Elizabeth. I still think that the poet who could read German and write English might give a version of his play that would live; but then it should be no affair of patchwork, no mosaic from

Banks and St. John, and scraps collected from "all simples that have virtue under the moon;" but what the author of "The Robbers" and "Don Carlos" has done with the subject — apologising in some degree for his freedom as to the facts, and his foreign view of the whole business.

Our great actress has been alluded to as slightly connected with the commencement of his Majesty's indisposition. She now very willingly lent herself and her talents to the celebration of his recovery. The disappointment of Opposition, so near the possession of political power as to anticipate appointments and bestow bishoprics, was presumed to have forgotten itself in the general joy occasioned by the king's restoration to perfect health. The predictions as to his Majesty's displeasure at certain provisions of Mr. Pitt were answered by the contrary expressions of entire satisfaction and augmented confidence, and the minister was preserved for the mighty task of resisting the revolutionary power of France. But the club at Brookes's could not submit to lag behind in the festivities of the metropolis; and they gave a promenade, with a concert and recitation, supper and ball, and so on, to the ladies in the Opera House — fitted up superbly for the occasion. Mrs. Siddons, I think, idly condescended to be dressed as Britannia, and recited an ode written in the gossamer style of Della Crusca Merry, with all the fiction at least of the truest poetry; for he

was a furious zealot for liberty, and was at length hurried on to be the eulogist at least of actions which will render in future times the veracity of the historian suspected. That decided cant which, by its vehement longings for the preservation of freedom, implies that it is considered to be in danger, was not spared. We had, in compliment to his Majesty's recovery, "Long may he rule a willing land," followed immediately by the check to inconsiderate loyalty, —

> "But, oh! for ever may that land be free!"

Yet occasionally the poet wandered into thinner air than the atmosphere of politics; and having sounded the inspiring union of George and Liberty! he immediately invokes the fairies:

> "Fairy people! ye who dwell
> In fragrant evening's vapoury cell,
> To the clear moon oft repair."

They who have beheld the graceful form of Mrs. Siddons, and heard the solemn and melodious dignity of her declamation, may fancy the effect of such fine writing from her mouth, and imagine the astonishment of the spectators when, having finished the ode, she sat down in the exact attitude of Britannia as impressed upon our copper coin.

With the policy which the best taste is pardonable for exercising as to a benefit night, Mrs.

Siddons repeated this ode on the 11th of May at Drury Lane Theatre, after acting Juliet, which, I think, never became one of her current parts. The passion of "Romeo and Juliet" is entirely without dignity: it springs up, like the mushroom, in a night, and its flavour is earthy. To speak without a figure, there is no mind in it; family interests it opposes, and the first glance on both sides renders it irresistible. It is adorned by all the magic of Shakespeare's fancy, and the play is consequently the text-book of our English lovers before the years of discretion. It is afterward, I believe, deemed childish, and the actual age of the lovely Italian is thought the best justification of her vehemence and folly. There is, therefore, much to be visually surmounted before the sage and sober character of the Siddonian countenance can be received as the expression of enthusiastic and unreflecting passion; or rather the face indicated more mind than is found in the character of Juliet.

But the art of the great actress made a powerful struggle against her natural strength; and so much of seeming artlessness was assumed, and so delightfully was the language modulated, that at times the ascendency of the mother and the nurse did not seem preposterous and incredible.

The acting play has carefully expunged the traces of Romeo's previous passion for Rosaline,[1]

[1] In Shakespeare, Rosaline was to be a guest at Capulet's feast, and it was precisely to work at least a comparative cure of

so that the lovers seem predestined to complete each other's misery, and exist only for that love which destroys them. The German taste has found a vast deal of mysticism in the devotion of our lovers, and much of the "unintelligible world" is, no doubt, faithfully described by those bulky "couriers of the air." Our duller imaginations see nothing but a disastrous and juvenile passion, an attraction of the exterior alone; where, beauty being found, the higher requisites are overlooked, or rather presumed to be the necessary inhabitants of a graceful structure.

Mrs. Siddons was now in the "mid season of this mortal life," and therefore numbered twenty years more than the fond enthusiast of Verona. Her beauty was of that kind to which time adds strength without much diminishing sweetness. Her art had more impressed her features than her age. The agonising calls upon their expression had compelled the muscles into powerful action; and however they might be composed

his passion for her that his friend Benvolio would have him go thither. Romeo is too confident of his steadiness, and perishes by the bright ordeal he provokes. Yet Rosaline is not named by them at the banquet, and the first glance at Juliet dispels a passion esteemed by him who entertains it incapable of change, —

> "When the devout religion of mine eye
> Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires!"

As Rosaline had never heard even of his passion, the punishment of his facility is rather severe.

under the control of the great magician, yet the countenance was too strong for Juliet. The eye, however, perfectly answered the mind; and what is or can be so essential to an actress as this visual eloquence?

Had Mr. Garrick, as her first appearance in London, brought her out in Juliet, the winning gentleness of her first scenes, contrasting with the ardent affection and speaking terrors of the latter, must have established her at once; but he chose to retain her as of counsel in the matter of Shylock *versus* Antonio, and exhibited as an eloquent pleader what should have been the undisguised organ of the most intense feelings of her sex.

When such an actor as Mr. Garrick had determined upon acting Romeo himself, it would follow as a branch of his own success to render the performance of Juliet as perfect as the most scrupulous attention to his fair partner could make it. The reciprocation of looks, the combinations of attitude, the meaning of every line, the quality of every sound, were to be in the most exact unison, or one of the characters must suffer from the other. It was not likely, therefore, that he should leave any very striking novelties to even the genius of Mrs. Siddons. I think, upon the whole, that she stood pretty much upon the former level of Juliet, except that in the balcony there was more perfect utterance, by which I mean that the sense

came fuller upon the ear; and in the humouring of the nurse there was something of a more genuine playfulness than I had heard before; as in the alarming scene of lonely midnight meditation the tragic force of the great heroine rendered all competition hopeless.

There is something in the scene of Juliet's grave greatly at variance with the text, and with propriety itself. We have a churchyard, and in it the monument of the Capulets. "Why I descend into this bed of death" is the expression of Romeo, who yet does not descend at all. He is furnished with a wrenching iron which would enable him, by a proper application of his force, to remove the covering of the vault, and thus put it in his power to descend into the spacious receptacle —

> "Where for these many hundred years, the bones
> Of all the buried [Capulets] are pack'd."

But our stage Romeo batters a couple of doors fiercely with the crow in his grasp, which very naturally fly open outwards; and there, in all her supposed "maiden strewments," lies Juliet, above ground, ingeniously obvious to the audience. Surely all this is grossly absurd, and a more creditable piece of machinery should now triumph over the early poverty of scenical arrangement. It would clearly be better if Romeo descended into the monument, and bore Juliet in his arms to revisit the glimpses of the moon; a far more

natural arrangement, and in which Herculean labour he might receive invisible assistance from an ascending trap within the monument. However, the start, when she is discovered, is a fine thing; the whirling of the iron crow is another fine thing; and to hear the clapping from the gallery at such a moment must greatly delight the actor and actress, who are disposed in attitudes so strikingly picturesque.

I know the change made in the very action itself, and certainly do not regret that Juliet wakes before Romeo expires, because it affords a scene of exquisite emotion, but it should be consistently arranged. Romeo bears her from the tomb, and yet two speeches afterward she is in the vault of death, which the mere churchyard cannot be called. The dreadful mining company of undertakers must settle this uncommon disinterment. I profess my inability. When I said that the scene now given is one of great emotion, I must not be supposed to mean more than that the incident itself is deeply affecting. It is very meanly written when compared with the language of Shakespeare. The first hint of Juliet's waking before Romeo expires is from Otway, who has transformed our poet's lovers into Marcius and Lavinia; but he could lend little to the scene before us. Strange as it may sound, even Otway here has no passion — it is the strain of puerility. The modern scene consists, therefore, of odds and

ends, the "perfume and suppliance of an actor's memory," not the genuine language of the situation and the passion. Snatches of "The Mourning Bride" may be perceived, besides the miserable cant of —

> "'Twixt death and love I'm torn, I am distracted;"

and the infantine allusion —

> "Fathers have flinty hearts, no tears can melt 'em:
> Nature pleads in vain: children must be wretched."

As to the exclamations of Juliet, I will not be so rude as to question their propriety. But thus it is, if any improvement of Shakespeare's interest is suggested, the frigid commonplace in which it must be written, or is written, would lead us almost to the belief that the poet had breathed one common curse against the disturbers of any of his remains. See the lines over his grave at Stratford.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was natural to expect that the management of Mr. Kemble would have greatly strengthened the stage consequence of Mrs. Siddons; but certainly the reverse was the fact, and the second season of it saw her leave London for a tour both friendly and professional. If I have leave to blame in such a matter, I rather incline to think my late friend somewhat disposed, at that time, to build too strongly on his own resources; or at least to have been more attentive to the idle clamour relative to the family interests, and therefore disposed to allow his sister to demonstrate her value by her absence. I may have neglected to note down some still better reasons alleged at the time, but it was in truth a bold step to permit any one season to be divested of its greatest ornament; and I am apt to suspect some slight misunderstanding to have been at the bottom of her temporary secession. She was happily secure in the actual transcendency of her talent; and as one prodigy was dramatically sufficient for those times, she ran no risk whatever in the experiment. On the score of novelty she lost nothing; tragic com-

position was at a very low ebb among us; and indeed, since then, the only high tides we have experienced have been forced by the heavy swells of the German Ocean.

I have not continued a comparative estimate of the attraction of Mrs. Siddons in her old characters; but for many years Isabella, the first she acted of her brilliant period, continued to be most frequently repeated; and I must so far think the preference a just one, that I am quite sure I saw it myself oftener than any of the powerful list, those of Shakespeare only excepted, in which the attraction was not entirely her own. Nor did she experience the slightest failure of patronage; on her own night, in the season of 1790–91, she had £412 in the house to "The Gamester." That house, it will be remembered, was Garrick's, and this was the year of its condemnation. We shall next survey Mrs. Siddons acting upon a larger stage, and attend to the alteration in some degree of her style of action, which, moving in a greater space, certainly became more grand and imposing.

In the year 1792 this experiment of her powers upon a stage constructed for Italian opera and ballet was made, and succeeded almost beyond expectation. That the spectators in the front of the house lost much of her expression I know, though I seldom sat there; for the passage between the orchestra and the pit had a very com-

fortable seat for about thirty amateurs of the art, and, with a little activity and address, it was never very difficult to obtain a place there. And from this situation, in all her towering majesty of person, and in the maturity of her excellence, I received impressions which I could never consent to lose, and which have certainly not been endangered by any effects from succeeding performers.

But I have hinted at some change of style, the result of the new sphere of exertion. There is nothing in Italian opera that requires very extraordinary width of stage. It must, therefore, have been suggested by a numerous *corps de ballet*, which covers the whole proscenium. The side scenes are at a great distance from the front of the stage. In the Italian opera, after the singer, male or female, has finished the usual colloquy with the prompter behind the central hood which conceals his occiput, though not his tongue, from the visitors, the usual mode is to turn short around, and, presenting the back view to their admirers, with the arms raised, somewhat in the figure of a candlestick with two branches, to walk away rather rapidly, without the smallest grace, and if any applause should pursue their march, or has attended their music, to make a bow or curtsey at the wing, and hurry off to the fireside. But either the entrance or exit of English tragedy is a matter that must be somewhat closer in its bearing upon the business of the scene.

So few English performers are ever perfectly at their ease upon the stage, that the springing off with a glance at the pit, if it were not thought energetic, would be chosen from nervous impatience at supporting the gaze of thousands while the performer merely walks away. All the rhymed couplets to carry them off with effect attest the misery of departure; and the speaking a few words at entering also shows the desire to come into as speedy a commerce with the audience as can possibly be achieved.

The amazing self-possession of Mrs. Siddons rendered distance only the means of displaying a system of graceful and considerate dignity, or weighty and lingering affliction, as the case might demand. In the hurry of distraction she could stop, and in some frenzied attitude speak wonders to the eye, till a second rush forward brought her to the proper ground on which her utterance might be trusted. I will not be so ungallant as to ascribe the composure of this grand woman to any vain complacency in her majestic form. By thinking so I should ill repay that artist-like admiration with which I always beheld it. No; I believe she thought at such moments only of the character and the support it demanded from her of every kind. When Mrs. Siddons quitted her dressing-room I believe she left there the last thought about herself. Never did I see her eye wander from the business of the scene, — no recognisance

of the most noble of her friends exchanged the character for the individual. In this duty her brother would frequently fail; and he seemed to take a delight in showing how absolute a mastery he possessed, — that he could make a sign and sometimes speak to a friend near him, and yet seem to carry on the action and the look of the character. I never saw this in his sister, no, not for a moment. It was this devotion to what she was about that left so little inequality in her numerous repetitions of the same part. Kemble, to use the extravagant opposition of one of Doctor Young's figures, in acting was a "worm or a god." He walked or dozed through the character, or sublimed it with energy and grace. Constitutional infirmity, cough, and the opium he used to quiet it are to account for this; we had often to regret it. But I never saw an indifferent performance from Siddons, though I may have witnessed a cold or a noisy audience. The uniform temperance of female life had its share in the conservation of this fulness of power; but no domestic life is without its own cares, vexations, or sorrows, and the admirable art by which their effects were suspended for the duties of profession shows a mental firmness of the highest value.

Conspiring with the larger stage to produce some change in her style was her delight in statuary, which directed her attention to the antique, and made a remarkable impression upon her

as to simplicity of attire and severity of attitude. The actress had formerly complied with fashion, and deemed the prevalent becoming; she now saw that tragedy was debased by the flutter of light materials, and that the head, and all its powerful action from the shoulder, should never be encumbered by the monstrous inventions of the hairdresser and the milliner. She was now, therefore, prepared to introduce a mode of stage decoration and of deportment parting from one common principle, itself originating with a people qualified to legislate even in taste itself. What, however, began in good sense, deciding among the forms of grace and beauty, was, by political mania in the rival nation, carried into the excess of shameless indecency. France soon sent us over her amazons to burlesque all classical costume, and her models were received among us with unaffected disgust. What Mrs. Siddons had chosen remains in a great degree the standard of female costume to the present hour; and any little excesses by degrees dropped off, and left our ladies the heirs of her taste and its inseparable modesty. I have said that her deportment now varied considerably; and I have no doubt of the fact. In a small space the turns are quick and short. Where the area is considerable the step is wider, the figure more erect, and the whole progress more grand and powerful; the action is more from the shoulder, and we now first began to hear of the perfect

form of Mrs. Siddons's arm. Her walk has never been attempted by any other actress, and in deliberate dignity was as much alone as the expression of her countenance.

In point of scenery little could be done at the Opera House for the accommodation of the English drama; and the small flats of Drury Lane were lost under a roof so towering. But neither tragedy nor comedy ever seemed with me to derive a benefit proportioned to the pains that have been taken in the scenic department of our stages. When the scenes are first drawn on, or the roller descends, the work exhibited is considered a few moments as a work of art; the persons who move before it then engross the attention; at their exit it is raised or drawn off, and is speedily forgotten, or seen with indifference the second time. If the perspective as to the actor standing in front of the scene was so accurate that the whole effect should be delusive, and the impression be of actual sky and land and building (though an objection will always remain to the abrupt junction of the borders with the tops of the scenes, the wings, and the scoring line, where the flats meet each other, the grooves in which they move, the boarded stage, and other difficulties hitherto insurmountable), I could understand the object of those who expend so much money on their elaboration; but I confess I am of opinion that they should never do more than

suggest to the imagination ; and that it would not be desirable that the spectator should lose his senses to the point of forgetting that he is in a regular theatre, and enjoying a work of art invented for his amusement and his instruction by a poet, and acted by another artist of corresponding talent, called a player. All beyond this is the dream of ignorance and inexperience.

I have already hinted at my impression that the powers of the truly great comedian, using the term to express an actor of either species of the drama, are superior to all this aid ; his commerce is with the judgment and the passions ; it is vitality operating upon kindred life, — man awaking the sympathies of man. When we have such a being as Mrs. Siddons before us in Lady Macbeth, what signifies the order or disorder of the picture of a castle behind her, or whether the shadows lie upwards or downwards on the mouldings of a midnight apartment ? It is to the terror of her eye ; it is to the vehement and commanding sweep of her action ; it is to the perfection of her voice that I am a captive, and I must pity the man who, not being the painter of the canvas, is at leisure to inquire how it is executed.

The historian of the stage is but seldom called to notice any glaring offence against public decorum. Managers sympathise for the most part with the public feeling, and are always alive to their own interest. I leave the following mistake

upon record. The second or Legislative Assembly of France, in the month of December, 1791, had determined upon war with the military powers on the Continent. "Louis the Sixteenth was affirmed to be at the head of an Austrian committee in the Tuileries. A hundred thousand Frenchmen, brave and well armed, —

"'Longing wait the signal to attack.'

The English government can only strike at a distance, while the people of England will offer up prayers for the success which they know will one day be their own."

In the face of this wicked libel, read, with whatever feelings, in all the coffee-houses and most of the respectable dwellings in London, a day recurs which reminds all but savages, of the grand rebellion in this country and the mock trial of its sovereign, and his public execution on the 30th of January. A venerable custom of long standing had kept this day as one of fast and humiliation. If our Church contained within its priesthood any peculiar powers of oratory, that theme was treated by them before our two Houses of Parliament, and the public demonstration of concern for the errors of the last century almost guaranteed the land from any renewal of such horrors here, or the slightest countenance to their recurrence elsewhere.

The Theatre Royal of Drury Lane, boasting occasionally the presence of his Majesty and his

august family within its walls, on the 30th of January, 1792, selected for the amusements of the evening the buffooneries of "Cymon," with the farce of "The Devil to Pay." Could any conduct be more likely to continue the miserable dupes of Paris in the opinion which I have just quoted? Could they fail to hurry forward the steps on their side the water which led to a similar catastrophe, to be treated by themselves with even superior scorn, contempt, or derision? See, they would say, how a theatre, under the direction of the accomplished Sheridan, the friend of man, respects the feelings of loyalty still lingering in a few of the privileged orders. The proceeding is of no more moment in England now than it was in 1649, when the friends of equality who signed the sentence for Charles's execution were so sportive as to ink each other's fingers by drawing through them that pen which decreed the sovereignty of the people.

Mrs. Siddons opened her season of 1792 with "Isabella," and on the 7th of February acted what is called Queen Elizabeth in "Richard the Third," —a character helpless, facile, and lachrymose, a victim and a plaything to the active villainy of the tyrant. In Mrs. Siddons's situation she should have refused the part. Had I been in her brother's, I would not have asked her to perform it. I fancy he caught at the strength which her name would give to the playbill, without reflecting that her attraction was weakened by applying her talent

to matter unworthy of it. When a really great actress is in a theatre, her name should be the signal of delight. Even novelties should be sparingly graced by her performances, and they should possess unquestioned merit. If the art of the actress could produce great effects with slender materials, she should not be permitted to bear down true taste and judgment; the lips of Mrs. Siddons should be devoted to the purest strains of dramatic poesy.

On the 26th of March, after her sublime impersonation of Queen Katharine in "Henry the Eighth," she indulged her friends with a recitation of Collins's "Ode on the Passions." This was a composition for music, and it could not well have better than the voice of Mrs. Siddons. She was in truth the organ of passion; but the poet here describes the passion by its sympathies with particular scenes in nature, and its characteristic expression when fully displayed. The human form under its influence is given as the symbol of the passion. The actress who described the character lent, in a great degree, her countenance and her gesture as aids to the beautiful imagery of the poet. This is unavoidable in all stage recitation, and criticism must not proudly reject the living commentary upon language, however forcible.

The pictures of Hope, Revenge, Melancholy, Cheerfulness, and Joy admit easily of this impersonation, — they are drawn at length, and are extremely vivid. Fear is very slightly touched

indeed, compared with the ode on the subject by the same lovely poet. Pity might easily be improved by some delightful illustrations from the author's ode to a kindred being, Mercy. Such, for instance, as the following:

"When he whom even our joys provoke,
The fiend of nature, join'd his yoke,
And rush'd in wrath to make our isle his prey;
Thy form, from out thy sweet abode,
O'ertook him on his blasted road,
And stopp'd his wheels and look'd his rage away."

Jealousy is only described by its vacillation; and Love is wantoning in her beauty, with zone unbound, and tresses floating in the dance of Joy, instead of exerting her mighty influence over the mind, swelling it to rapture and delighting even by its agonies.

On the 28th of April Mrs. Siddons performed the Jealous Wife, — a character, for whatever reason, devoted to comedy, though I have often tried to conceive a tragic exhibition of female jealousy that should produce a character for the actress, equal in its effects to the noble Moor. But, alas! invent what you might of interest or delusive appearance, the mind of Shakespeare would be still required to fill up the outline with natural thought and its expression.

"Such bliss to one alone
Of all the sons of soul was known."

I look, however, upon Mr. Colman's "Jealous Wife" to be a *chef-d'œuvre* of comedy, and, though unsupported by wit, to have a power of truth and neatness which he never afterward fully equalled. Mrs. Oakley is an object of sincere pity. She never loses the respect of those who witness the self-tormentress. Murphy, after his French model, ran his Lady Restless down into farce. To this level it always hurt me to see Mrs. Siddons descend.

The original cast of "The Jealous Wife" — I mean as to its principal parts — it may be proper to notice upon the present occasion. Garrick himself kindly acted Mr. Oakley, though not of that importance to himself which might have been wished. Yates, an admirable actor, performed the major; King, Sir Harry Beagle; and the accomplished O'Brien, Lord Trinket; Mrs. Pritchard the Jealous Wife; and the Clive, that *insouciante* profligate woman of *bon ton* transferred from Fielding, and by her "new possessor" called Lady Freelove.

Kemble was the Oakley of the revival, and Palmer, who had been the original Charles, was become by time a very whimsical major, and really enjoyed the extreme indulgence of his brother. Mrs. Pritchard was before my time. She was, it seems, one of those prodigies whom the stage inspires with elegance, taste, and correctness which she never had, or affected to despise, in private

life, — a dangerous trick, if it be one, or a miraculous change without an adequate cause. Faulty pronunciation has adhered in my own time to many performers of both sexes and of great excellence, and the knowledge has exceeded the practice. But vulgarity in utterance is itself a debasing thing, and is but indifferently palliated by either the toilet or the dancing master.

I have never been strongly tempted by the comedy of either Mrs. Siddons or her late brother; but her Mrs. Oakley was certainly the perfect representation of a sensible but jealous woman. She seemed to plunge into her mistakes with great ease and nature; and the scene of simulation in the second act, where she enters with good humour into the feelings of her husband for Charles, in order to extract from him all that he knows relative to the object of her jealousy; the returning fiend and the exclamation "Amazing!" which lets him see that he has been only feeding the flame while he thought he was quenching the fire, — all was as perfect, I think, as her tragedy itself. The comic scene, where Mrs. Oakley falls into practised fits as a mode of alarming humanity, if love should be tired out, I hope is a libel upon the ladies. However, I perfectly approve of the remedy if you are sure of the distemper. But nothing gave me higher gratification than to observe in that most expressive of faces the dawning of conviction that she had been imposing upon her-

self, and the growing effects of irresistible evidence reducing her to shame for her violence, and apprehension that she may have trifled with love till it is lost. What security Oakley has against the return of a malady seemingly constitutional the spectator may fancy for himself, but I believe the only moral Proteus is the last act of a comedy.

Colman's friend, Lloyd, wrote an excellent prologue to this play, the last couplet of which he remembered when he introduced his most entertaining son to the public as an author in the year 1784, —

> "Do justice on him! as on fools before,
> And give to blockheads past one blockhead more."

When Mr. Colman, after the prefatory "if," directed the audience to damn him for "a chip of the old block," he in fact invited them to applaud a son worthy of the author of "The Jealous Wife," "The Clandestine Marriage," and the English Terence. To think of such men is the charm of existence and the consolation of old age.

That very clever artist (for his invention was nothing), Murphy, in the summer of 1783, had been so much struck by the talents of Mrs. Siddons, that he resolved to write a tragedy expressly for her. The subject appears to have been suggested to him by Madame de Sévigné's mention of the success of La Champmêlée in the younger

Corneille's "Ariane," performed in the beginning of the year 1672.

After a careful perusal of the French and English Ariadnes, I have not a moment's hesitation in preferring Corneille to Murphy. The latter has made more bustle without more actual business, and in his attempt to raise the diction, which Voltaire found often prosaic, he has robbed it of that truth of sentiment and almost colloquial expression by which, spoken as naturally as written, La Champmêlée was enabled to "interest every heart, and leave every eye dissolved in tears."

But by raising the diction Voltaire did not mean cramming it with figures, and talking

> "In a high strutting style of the stars,
> The eagle of Jove, and the chariot of Mars."

When in Murphy's second act the back scene opens and soft music is heard (the minuet in "Ariadne"); when Ariadne advances with a train of virgins, like Elfrida in "Caractacus," and speaks her very language; when she pours out a most unnatural rhapsody upon the sun coming to quell the howling blast, and the circling hours with blessings on their wings, and bright hope and rose-lipped health, and pure delight and love and joy, nothing is gained by such trash to the author, and the actress is destroyed by it. But hear the candid confession of Voltaire as to Corneille's language. "Ce sont là" (the third scene of his

fifth act) "de ces vers que la situation seule rend excellents; les moindres ornements les affaibliraient; c'est un très grand mérite: tant il est vrai que le naturel est toujours ce qui plaît le plus." And in another place, of four lines spoken by Ariane relative to her sister Phedra: "See," says he, "how in these four lines everything is natural and easy, no unnecessary word, nor any one out of its proper place."

It should, in passing, be observed, to the credit of the French actress, that though Racine was her lover, yet in the case of the Corneilles she never sacrificed her professional duty to her personal attachments. She rendered the Ariane exquisitely touching and tenderly triumphant, though everything besides in the play was mean and worthless, and almost risible. The King of Naxos is an amorous cipher, Theseus and Pirithous creeping scoundrels, and Phedra a perfidious and unnatural sister; all of whom might with true poetical justice be turned loose in the Cretan labyrinth, without the clue to guide them from the tyranny of Minos.

Murphy has left Phedra as bad as he found her. Pirithous he has made at least a gentleman, and so far improved the play; but the poniard, that wretched executioner of all English tragedies, should have been spared, upon the precedent supplied by Corneille. My old friend did not bring out his play in 1784, highly as he thought of Mrs.

Siddons, "because," as he says, "a play that might linger nine nights upon the stage was not the object of the author's ambition;" he therefore kept his piece by him nine years, and in 1793 it was acted six times, and no more. But it must not be concealed, our mixed English audiences have very few favourites among the personages of antiquity, and the few they have hold rather by prescription than fondness. The Roman part of them make their fortune among us by high and swelling sentiments of liberty, or a grand and ostentatious courage. Theseus and Ariadne might linger formerly upon our tapestry, — their last retreat. The skill of the artists may be questionable as to either design or execution, but that our poets could at least furnish splendid hints of this very subject we may know by that exquisite instruction to the needle given by Aspatia in "The Maid's Tragedy:"

> "Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now,
> Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown by the wind,
> Wild as the desert; and let all about me
> Tell that I am forsaken. Make me look
> Like Sorrow's monument, and the trees about me
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
> Groan with continual surges; and, behind me,
> Make all a desolation."

This and every collateral aid Mrs. Siddons availed herself of in the conception of Ariadne;

but the truth is, the scenes were repetitions of each other, and the heroine could only rave of the perfidy of Theseus, and either he, or Pirithous, or her sister, could do no more than incessantly remind her that, since his affections had another object, she could not do better than change also, and marry the doting King of Naxos. Incidents so meagre, worn to the very bone through five long acts, even Mrs. Siddons could not render interesting; passages there were occasionally of great force — but the tears did not flow, as they did at the simpler style of Corneille; and all the turgid efforts of the English poet only battered the ear, and left the heart in a state of repose unnatural to the subject.

Thus (a hard fate) the novelties of her own day did nothing for the fame of the actress.

Mrs. Siddons, on the 21st of April, 1794, had the satisfaction of opening with her Lady Macbeth the new theatre of Drury Lane, erected by Mr. Holland, and, in my opinion, the most chaste and beautiful structure that ever bore the name. It was on this occasion that Mr. Kemble, on the authority of the poet Lloyd, permitted himself, against the declared intention of Shakespeare, to banish the ghost of Banquo. If there resulted from the language no sort of ambiguity — if Macbeth named Banquo when he started at vacancy — despising all the philosophy of such disorders, I should prefer being visibly made acquainted with

the object of his terrors to all that speech could do for the patron of this extensive imagination.

It is thus that Lloyd expresses himself in "The Actor:"

> "Why need the ghost usurp the monarch's place,
> To frighten children with his mealy face?
> The king alone should form the phantom there,
> And talk and tremble at the empty chair."

I have nothing whatever to combat where it is ludicrously done. If we are to have Banquo close to the eye, dressed like Guy Fawkes himself, and becoming a chair no better, the matter is soon determined; but it might unquestionably be rendered both picturesque and terrible. In a former work I have reasoned upon the stage direction still remaining in the only copy of "Macbeth," and no doubt proceeding from the pen of Shakespeare himself. But the subject has all along been argued as if the appearance of Banquo was only a visual sign to the spectators of the object of Macbeth's imagination. This is no true account of the matter. Macbeth's mind is not in a situation to shape ideal terrors; the destruction of his enemy, the grown serpent, had such charms for him as to render him ten times himself; and the worm that fled annoys him only with the prospect of venom to be bred at a future time. He is so much at his ease as even to finesse upon the subject, and express an anxious wish for the presence

of Banquo at the banquet, to which he was invited, and which he would have graced but for the treacherous assassination which cut him off in sight of the illuminated hall of festivity. At this moment, to confound his hypocrisy and torture his guilt, the spirit of his murdered friend, availing himself of the power to become visible to one[1] only of a mixed assembly, arrayed in all his terrors ascends the royal seat, the living presentment of that body which, with twenty trenched gashes about it, safely, as Macbeth supposes, bides in a neighbouring ditch. It is thus that the ghost of Denmark chooses to revisit his son in the closet of the queen, visible and audible to him alone; his wretched mother seeing nothing of that "gracious figure," nor hearing one syllable even of the tender admonition to Hamlet in her own favour:

> "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught. Leave her to Heaven."

I have known few sounder thinkers than my late friend Opie, and he was highly indignant at the innovation in question. In the kindred art Sir Joshua Reynolds had been arraigned for introducing the "busy meddling fiend" behind the pillow of his dying cardinal. Mr. Opie went a

[1] Let us take our faith in this matter from Prospero himself:

> "Be subject to no sight but thine and mine:
> Invisible to every eyeball else." — *Tempest.*

little out of his way to have the pleasure of noticing the effect of similar criticism applied to the designs of Shakespeare. I take the liberty of quoting his own expression, which was always masterly:

"I know of no one who has availed himself of poetic license with more address than Sir Joshua Reynolds in his celebrated picture of the death of Cardinal Beaufort, painted for the Shakespeare Gallery. The varied beauties of this work might well employ a great part of a lecture; but, at present, I shall pass them over, and attend only to what relates immediately to the question before us, the effect of the visionary devil, couched close, and listening eagerly behind the pillow of the dying wretch, which not only invigorates and clothes the subject in its appropriate interest and terror, but immediately clears up all ambiguity, by informing us that those are not bodily sufferings which we behold so forcibly delineated, that they are not merely the pangs of death which make him grin, but that his agony proceeds from those daggers of the mind, the overwhelming horrors of a guilty and awakened conscience. This was the point on which rested the whole moral effect of the piece; it was absolutely necessary to be understood, and could by no other means have been so strongly and perspicuously expressed."

He then, in his forcible manner, ridicules the objectors to this mode of treating the subject, and proceeds thus:

"Of the same class were those who of late endeavoured to rob the play of 'Macbeth' of the resurrection of Banquo's ghost to fill the chair of the murderer. Happily,

however, for the true lovers of Shakespeare, the genuine feelings of the public have decided against this most barbarous mutilation."

That Shakespeare believed such an appearance possible there can be little question. He knew the distinction between "he thinks he sees him" and he "knows he sees him," between "thick-coming fancies" and preternatural realities; and such is either the truth of tradition upon this subject, or the tendency of our common nature to credit such an occurrence, that, let the sturdiest of the sect, the best satisfied that "nothing but substance can be an object of vision," consider the subject alone, in profound silence, and at the midnight hour; and if he makes a faithful report of his condition, his startled senses will confess the invincible superstition of his feelings, if he will not allow the term to be fairly applicable to his understanding.

In point of size, and even splendour, the Apollo Drury did not equal the Opera House, a structure intended more particularly for the display of beauty in higher life, and the best part of whose exhibition is certainly before the curtain. But it was admirably adapted to all the purposes of playing, and could even conveniently admit within its walls a nightly receipt of £700. Nor did it look deserted on a thin night. So judiciously was its front decorated that the visitors saw well and were well seen, and as to numbers the house appeared respectable when the attraction fell off.

As to the general perfection of the stage of this theatre, nothing had ever among us, in thought, approached it. Everything that machinery could accomplish was put within the grasp of the proprietors; the scenery rose from below the stage or descended thither, and was in itself vast and beautiful; and a wardrobe was absolutely necessary of more than common or o'er-dyed materials, not to disgrace this palace of Eastern magnificence. One might have been tempted to fancy that the eloquent prosecutor of Mr. Hastings had raised his triumphant theatre out of the divided spoils of the governor-general of India.

Mrs. Siddons on this first appearance in the new theatre would have been more than human if she had not exulted. It was unquestionably the finest in Europe; and the conduct of it, and its main support, certainly in her own family. As to the property itself, I am very sure that they grasped it in imagination. So devoted to politics as Mr. Sheridan seemed, it might look more than a remote probability that he would one day take office with his party; and that a theatre and its concerns must be resigned to the more urgent claims of official dignity and business. At such a time a sale might take place upon liberal and easy terms, and the influence of Mr. Sheridan upon the fashionable world continue a marked preference to a theatre of which he had been the proprietor and was still the guardian. On

this night of opening, the Kemble family took a new hold upon the theatre and the town by producing Mr. Charles Kemble, then a youth of eighteen, in the character of Malcolm. His excellent brother was in this and every other part of his conduct to him judicious as well as kind. In my life of Mr. Kemble I have recorded his private opinion of the powers he discovered; and he snatched him from envy, as well as intoxicating vanity, by allotting to him a range of pleasing but not important characters, from which he was to lift himself by his talents, rather than succeed to better as a birthright.

As it can form no part of my plan, however I may respect him, to pursue him step by step to his present confirmed rank in the profession, I may be indulged in a summary, but I hope a distinct, sketch of this most elegant actor, in which I shall not disguise his difficulties, because they must be weighed in order fully to appreciate his merits. The first and most important was that he had to make himself a name in the art, not against, but in conjunction with the splendid talents of his brother, in the maturity of his powers, whether of nature or study, and constantly to sustain a comparison which was likely to be made by everybody but himself. In his countenance he perhaps more resembled Mrs. Siddons than Mr. Kemble. He had an expression of intelligent innocence, that peculiarly fitted him for the youthful heroes of the

drama, and which in advanced life is so characteristic of his look that it has retained him in the performance of parts which otherwise he might be said to have outgrown. He never had the slightest appearance of imitating his brother, and from the first of him always struck me to act from his own perceptions. Deeply retired in himself, confident in his twofold strength of person and industry, there was a calm complacency about Mr. Kemble that kept him always upon his centre in a sort of regardless majesty: he calculated everything, and prophesied his effects. Charles was ardent and anxious to obtain applause; he sometimes became too boisterous in his action and too noisy in his speech; his voice was frequently not under government and pained the ear. If he had thought less of his audience, he would not, to be sure, have pleased them more, but served them better.

But let us look at him now that experience has given him more confidence, and circumstances extended his range. We shall find that his predominant excellence is in comedy; and that in a long list of tragic characters there is nothing else near him. He is our Benedick, our Prince Hal (ay, and a Hal who can act Falstaff, too), our Petruchio, our Leon, and our Orlando. He is our Charles Surface, our Young Marlow, our Lovemore, our Mirabel, our Don Felix, our Captain Absolute, and our Colonel Feignwell. It is

now, I believe, clear that his Hamlet never ought to have yielded unless to his brother's. His Romeo, his Antony, his Macduff, his Edgar, his Cassio, his Jaffier, his Carlos, his Stukely, and many others, are as near perfection as anything in our own times, and better acted by him than by any other living performer.

The German theatre now began to excite our attention, and Lessing supplied our adapters with a tragedy called "Emilia Galotti." Mrs. Siddons acted a Countess Orsina. "Rape and murder are not simple means," we are informed by our virtuous friend Glenalvon; but they are called into full exercise in this modernisation of the old story of Appius and Virginia. I know not why it had so short an existence among us; the interest was what is called powerful.

Mr. Cumberland wrote them a prologue, in which Mr. Whitfield admired exceedingly the beauty of the theatre, which he contrasted with "the straw-built" temple (nay, only thatched with straw) "that held the Drama's God." Now, however, he proceeds, should the "eventful time" inspire any second Shakespeare, the future Agincourt will have a nobler field than the Globe Theatre was on the banks of Thames. Our great poet has told us, with his accustomed point, that all appliances and means to boot will not so ensure slumber as the distressful labours of humble life. The penury of the early stage obliged the poet to paint for

the ear; and the description which set the fancy clearly to work produced a far more splendid series of scenes than even our Loutherbourgs or Stanfields ever executed. But it is certain in the long run, of what is called, and justly, improvement, the principal will be lost among his accessories; you will build upon the machinist and the painter, and you will have palaces worthy of heroes just as the race becomes extinct.

But hear the greatest of all authorities in matters of taste, which I find in letters upon a seemingly different subject written at this very time:

"The dresses, the scenes, the decorations of every kind, I am told, are in a new style of splendour and magnificence; whether to the advantage of our dramatic taste upon the whole I very much doubt. It is a show and a spectacle, not a play, that is exhibited. This is undoubtedly in the genuine manner of the Augustan age, but in a manner which was censured by one of the best poets and critics of that or any age." ("Burke's Works," Vol. iv. p. 600, 4to edition.)

"Migravit ab aure voluptas
Omnis ad incertos oculos, et gaudia vana:
Quatuor aut plures aulæa premuntur in horas;
Dum fugiunt equitum turmæ, peditumque catervæ."

Mr. Colman the younger, in a very serious epilogue, drew the attention of the public to the anarchy of political speculation and the murders of philosophy. This Mrs. Siddons must have had great pleasure in speaking, from the eulogy which

it contained upon the virtues of our own sovereign. The play needed such a corrective, for its interest proceeded from the tyrannous use of power. We had just experienced, by the treatment of the royal family of France, that power may change hands without correcting its excesses. "Emilia Galotti" lived but three nights.

On the 15th of November Whitehead's "Roman Father" was revived, that Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons might perform the Publius and Horatia; but I do not think that this brutal instance of Roman patriotism added much to the fame of either of our accomplished tragedians.

I have stated, at no very great distance from this place, the expectations that were reasonably entertained of the triumph of the new theatre, under the management of Mr. Kemble, and the hopes which it was natural would be formed by himself and his family. But improvidence was working at the heart of the concern to destroy all the advantages adhering actually to that theatre, and annoyances of so serious a kind stood in such a formidable array before Mr. Kemble that he determined to throw up the management; and Mr. Wroughton, in September, 1796, was announced to carry on the new system, or no system, of that immense concern.

To Mrs. Siddons I do not imagine the change was of any considerable moment. Talent like hers was sure of engagement, though payment

might continue to be attended with difficulties. She might even still more strictly require that performance on the side of the manager, which her brother no doubt often persuaded her to pass over, and resort at last steadily to the good old adage of Swiss reciprocity: "*Point d'argent, point de Suisse.*" Wroughton, I know, had grown mature in the Covent Garden prejudice against Kemble's management, and was decidedly of opinion that more money would be brought by modern comedy than by ancient tragedy, attended with the vast expense incident to its revival. There could be no doubt that Mrs. Jordan would think so too; and her influence in the theatre was, from a variety of causes, now become very considerable.

Upon the difficulty sometimes to find in the treasury the cash that had been taken at the door of the theatre volumes might be published. Sometimes, in the absence of everything like money, the mighty master himself would try the witchcraft of his wit upon Lady Macbeth; bring her in triumph along with him to the theatre, and pledge all he had, his honour, that she should be paid if she would but perform. Yes; I hold Sheridan to have been the most irresistible of mortals.

Among the attempts to give something like novelty to Mrs. Siddons, Thomson's "Edward and Eleonora" was tried for a night on the 22d October, 1796. But the period for such imitations of

the Greek stage was long gone by, though the sacrifice of Alcestis really ennobled the wife of Edward. Thomson began life as a true poet, looking at nature with an adoration of her grand features, and a fond affection for even the minutest parts of her endless economy. He was all eye and ear; and out of the library of Shakespeare and Spenser and Milton he had collected a store of bold and nervous language, which expressed much, and hinted more. It conveyed, with an air of much originality, all that he saw, and how he saw it. As he went forward in life he became connected with men who had never seen a mountain, or, to speak without a figure, critics founded upon French models. He, at their suggestion, polished the rough seasons of his native country, wrote interminable travels in blank verse, and tragedies on the plan of Racine. But "nature will break out," and our poet in his latest efforts evinced the possession of the most enchanting simplicity. The first canto of "The Castle of Indolence" showed how long he had lingered in the "delightful land of Faery;" that he had perfectly learned her Spenserian tongue, which he spoke with all the grace and fluency of a native.

While Mrs. Siddons might be said thus to struggle to keep up with her own the fame of English tragedy, the other muse was about to suffer a loss which thirty years have scarcely shown a tendency to replace. I mean the elevation of Miss

Farren to a coronet, by her marriage with the Earl of Derby in the year 1797. Perhaps I do not refer effects to causes inadequate to their production when I say that this theatrical demise absolutely produced the degeneracy of comedy into farce. The lady of our Congreves lost that court-like refinement in manners, that polished propriety in speech; the coarser parts in comedy were forced forward without a balance, without contrast; cultivated life on the stage became insipid as soon as its representative was without the necessary charms. This, with the natural tendency of revolutionary feelings to degrade everything, produced the absolute fall of genteel comedy, which had long been in a state of decline, and broad laughter reigned triumphant in the unbounded hilarity of Mrs. Jordan.

Many an elegant trifle, I well know, has proceeded from the muse of Lord Derby; but when that accomplished nobleman, *vatibus addere calcar*, spurred his Pegasus into the compliment which it contained in that remarkable line, "Perhaps a Farren may return no more," I could have wished the provinces of poet and prophet had at least for once been disunited.

It well became such a woman as Mrs. Siddons to notice this loss with a kind wish for the future happiness of her amiable sister of the scene. Accordingly, after a most affecting performance by Kemble and herself of Lillo's soul-harrowing "Fatal

Curiosity," to which "The Deuce Is in Him" was the farce, she thus noticed that her friend on that day became Lady Derby:

> "Our Comic Muse, too, lighter topics lending,
> Proves that in marriage was her natural ending;
> Whilst grateful for those smiles which made us gay,
> Each kindest wish awaits her wedding-day.
> And sure, such talents, honours, shar'd between 'em,
> If 'tis not happy, why — the Deuce is in 'em."

How all this was instilled into either gods or men, history is silent. The newspapers in the morning might do something; but some of my understanding friends said it meant a dull compliment to Miss Farren and a pointed attack upon Mrs. Jordan.

> "Why, what a world is this, when what is comely
> Envenoms her that bears it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was reserved for Kotzebue, through the medium of translation, to add two characters to the list of those performed by Mrs. Siddons. The first of these was Mrs. Haller in "The Stranger; or, Misanthropy and Repentance," which was acted the 24th of March, 1798, at Drury Lane Theatre. I shall not repeat myself in expressing here the opinion formerly given of the character of Mrs. Haller. I do not deny the interest which it excited, for I admit it to have been powerful in the extreme; but I have always thought the sympathy of my fair countrywomen in this case dangerous to their best interests. The Stranger himself is, perhaps, the noblest ruin that has hitherto marked the moral desolation of our own domestic manners.

Looking to dramatic effect, the Misanthropy towers much above the Repentance. Mrs. Haller, seeking friendship and requiring protection, is obliged to external conformity; if she feel the remorse of guilt and would cover the deepest shades of mysterious retirement as an indulgence, she is afraid that singularity would draw atten-

tion, and that she can only escape detection by every-day conduct. Suffering much herself, and meriting to suffer, she accepts the consolation of mitigating the sufferings of others; her virtue has been "sullied, not absorbed," and she would fain possess the esteem of those around her, though she has lost her own.

Mrs. Siddons acted this character with that subdued power which it required. The taste of Kotzebue did not lead him, like that of Schiller, to poetical elevation of his dialogue. He seems at times to think the stage and society identical; and his conversation scenes have a flatness and even vulgarity about them which is not to our taste. But there is an interest of the heart making its destined progress through all his plays, and the tears of his audiences are under the most absolute control. This, according to Schlegel, is the decided course of the sentimental dramatist: "The general lesson which he gives is that sensibility should obtain pardon for all its eccentricities and faults, and that we should drop our rigorous principles when the virtues are under our judgment. Behold how amiable is the youthful avowal of foibles, how sublime the dominion of the passions! What more is necessary than that the author should provide in the close some benevolent patron or forgiving dupe, who, scattering either wealth or pardon with unwithdrawing hand, shall put the seal of oblivion upon the simulated errors

of the stage; and, as to society, display the triumphant justification of actual depravity, and the glowing incentive to timid and now not shameless passion?"

We were alarmed at the freedom of our early writers, and the Bowdlers were set to purify their scenes from all loose or equivocal language; but what are *double entendres* to that seduction which shocks by no external sign, but insinuates itself into the bosom entirely without defence, and in the disguise of that sensibility which is the chief grace of woman?

I freely confess with respect to "The Stranger" that, however I rejoiced in the display of my friend Kemble, I never could, without strong reluctance, submit to see the character of Mrs. Haller represented by his sister. Her countenance, her noble figure, her chaste and dignified manners, were so utterly at variance with the wretched disclosure she had to make, that no knowledge that it was pure or rather impure fiction could reconcile me to this "forcible feeble;" that which was true of the character was so evidently false and impossible of its grand and beautiful representative.

Such a play as "The Stranger" would lead one almost to wish that the term comedy retained among ourselves the meaning that it bore in France during the dramatic reigns of Corneille and Racine, when they called "The Cid," and "Cinna," and

"Andromaque," and "Bajazet," comedies. Our division of the genus into its species leaves us without a term to describe this familiar copy of arm-in-arm lounging, superintendence of the household, colloquies with the butler, diving after his little excellency, confessions of adultery, and meetings of the parties in order to separate for ever, which conclude by embracing to part no more. It perhaps classes best with sentimental comedy. It has not the elevation of tragedy, and never borrows its tone of language, or keeps the most affecting scenes from puerility and the mawkish softness of the nursery. It has characters below the level of the serious muse, but they are not comic.

The domestic manners, which we are so compelled to notice in these German plays, may among that people have a favourable effect and aid the stage illusion. The immortal ridicule of our minister for these and other foreign affairs will best exhibit the vice of such composition.

The second character which Kotzebue supplied was even more dissolute than the first, but a woman of stronger mould. The aspiration of her mind is to be the companion of valour, and her fancy bestows upon mere courage the better feelings of magnanimity and compassion. Detecting that her hero is devoid of humanity, she hates with all the ardour of her former affection, and loses herself the very virtue whose absence in

the Peruvian conqueror endangers his life. She is at anybody's service who will but destroy him. The reader sees that I allude to Elvira in the tragedy of "Pizarro," a play got up by Sheridan himself, and into whose scenes he had infused some of the brilliant figures which he had composed for the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

It is not unlikely that from any other hand (as we used to write) Mrs. Siddons might have scrupled to accept a character so profligate and desperate; but Mr. Sheridan was not a man to be refused, and besides, the threatening popularity of any work to which he lent his name made it policy in a great actress not to condemn herself to her drawing-room for the rest of the season. There can be no doubt that Sheridan saw clearly enough the bad taste of such a camp-follower as Elvira; and he might also think that Mrs. Siddons would disdain to stifle her proper feelings, and render this Spanish Judith any jot more respectable than her whole class has ever been. However, from the natural desire to stand favourably with the audience, she mounted this lady of adventure into a heroine, and her performance was triumphantly shouted by crowded audiences as long as she continued to act the part.

But, as my friend Stuart told me, he had an opportunity of witnessing Sheridan's dread lest Mrs. Siddons should not "fall in" with his notion of the character of Elvira. However, without

seeking, perhaps in vain, what that notion might exactly be, when he found that she had made her hold upon the house, and that, except the heroic Rolla, nothing stood more prominent than this brave but rather unsafe *chère amie* of Pizarro, he could then persuade himself that she had "fallen into" his notion of the character, or, in surer language, rendered it not only bearable but successful. Upon the getting up of "Pizarro" Sheridan practised all the artifices of the coy or indolent author, —

> "That would be wooed, and not unsought be won."

He made his actors wait for the conclusion of their parts, and gave them, at the last moment, that which I have no sort of doubt he had long meditated and laboriously written. But he knew well the region of a playhouse, where either there is no wonder or all is wonder. Actors believe miracles against the evidence of their senses, and credit the elaboration of painful thought in the shape of impromptu. Sheridan would not have trusted his late importations among performers slow of study; the hurry, the anxiety, the alarm, the hope of his agents were favourable to his play; the zeal excited was like the enthusiasm of a crusade; it carried them through everything dangerous in triumph.

Sheridan had no opinion of Mrs. Jordan's tragedy; but there was one charm in her name and another

in her voice, and these recommended her to the beloved Cora; though, to use his own words, "he knew that she could not speak a line of it." Mr. Sheridan had a very powerful voice, but he declaimed very much in the style of Mr. Kemble, and was attentive to the music of the sentences which he uttered. He knew all the value of that great actor, and therefore worked up the Rolla of Kotzebue, till it read more like the Charles de Moore of Schiller's "Robbers," from whom indeed he borrowed that patriotic harangue which applied so admirably to our political circumstances in the year 1799.

Mrs. Siddons, perhaps for the only time in her life, acted on thirty-one successive nights of performance. But when the terrific length of the play was somewhat abridged, and it became smooth from repetition, there might have been even pleasure in the constancy of applause; and, from the full houses, a reasonable prospect of a treasury on the Saturday morning. It is but fair to presume that Mr. Kemble's desertion of the management contributed to this quite unparalleled exertion in Sheridan, — preparing "The Stranger" and "Pizarro" for his stage; but he was totally exhausted by so much industry; and from either Wroughton or James Aickin nothing beyond the mere stage management was to be expected.

I have omitted a few pieces of the serious kind, in which Mrs. Siddons acted at Drury Lane Thea-

tre, in order to bring together the two German plays, which alone still live upon our stage, and of which alone Mr. Sheridan was the avowed reformer or adapter, for he translated neither of them. I therefore here notice, in the first place, a play of my own, called "Aurelio and Miranda," produced on the 29th of December, 1798. It was remarkable for the utter failure of the fourth and fifth acts, the three first being rather powerful in the interest. With the experience of twenty years more, since the subject first struck me, I wonder how I could consent to the feeble arrangement of the plot, which is its vital defect. The passion of love to be treated in the dress of a monastic order is a frightful anomaly. Mrs. Siddons, to appearance, was a young monk, passionately enamoured of the superior, Aurelio. The whole piece partook strongly indeed of the nature of the Spanish romantic drama, and was drawn from the impure source of the novel entitled "The Monk," by Mr. Lewis. This was the only occasion on which I was ever honoured with the professional aid of Mrs. Siddons.

From Mr. Pye, the learned translator of Aristotle, the rival of Twining, a poet of some experience, it was reasonable to hope for a successful tragedy from English history; but his "Adelaide" was powerful only in scenes; and I despair now of any modern muse strong enough to assume the stage histories of which Shakespeare has left us

so many models, that tempt by the great abundance of their business, and become abortive from the feeble delineations of character, or the little nature in the dialogue.

In Miss Baillie's tragedy of "De Montfort" Mrs. Siddons did her utmost with the Countess Jane. But the basis of the tragedy was the passion of hatred, and the incidents were all gloomy and dark and deadly. On the stage, I believe, no spectator wished it a longer life, and it is to the last degree mortifying to have to exhibit so many proofs that the talent of dramatic writing in its noblest branch was, in fact, dead among us; and the powers of our transcendent actress were, like the mighty arms of some Paladin in romance, entirely unsuited to the feeble children who, to their mere confusion, were tempted to employ them. As some compensation for the failure of modern tragedies, Mr. Kemble returned to the management in the season of 1800–01, and ancient tragedy returned with him.

It was now understood among theatrical people that Mr. Kemble's resumption of the management was a step taken toward a purchase into the property, and Mr. Siddons was not disinclined to embark a considerable sum with my late friend in the concern; but I believe he considered the only absolute security to be Mr. Sheridan's retirement altogether, and the great orator held at this time a language highly flattering to such a hope. But

this arrangement, however desirable, upon a strict inquiry, was found to be impracticable; and, after a great deal of trouble and much uneasiness, the business ended by the secession of the great tragedians to the other theatre, and the purchase of Mr. Kemble into Covent Garden; the consequences of which unfortunate step are still pressing, and must long press, upon all the parties.

Although principally, no doubt, occupied by the professional exertions of Mrs. Siddons, I cannot pass over in silence that series of domestic sorrows which must have weighed heavily indeed upon her mind, and contributed, with an almost satiety of public applause, to cloud her progress with melancholy, and make her court a scene of repose and abstraction, however unfriendly to the business of life, — indeed to life itself.

Yet Mrs. Siddons was too well read not at all times to remember the consolatory lines of Young, who well understood the nature of man, —

> "His grief is but his dignity disguis'd,
> And discontent is immortality!"

On the 6th of October, 1798, her second daughter, Maria, sunk into the grave, at Bristol, of that flattering but usually hopeless malady, a decline. She was in truth one of the loveliest beings that I have ever known. I can hardly bring myself to allow so much, but she was, perhaps, more beautiful even than her mother, or rather what the latter

would have been if, with every indulgence in her earlier years, she had possessed full leisure to cultivate her taste and exercise her fancy, without any of those prodigious exertions which gave at last an appearance of strength and energy not usually characteristic of the English female. The gain is on the side of grandeur; the loss, of winning gentleness and almost angelic softness. To confirm this notion, a very early picture of Mrs. Siddons resembles this lamented and excellent young lady. There was at one time an expectation that she would have been permitted to give her hand in marriage to the present accomplished president of the Royal Academy. But I hasten from the subject.

When those from whom we derive our being resign their own, full of years and attended by the general regret of society, the pangs of nature may be soothed by reason, corrected by piety, or extenuated by time. Mrs. Siddons had, however, to lament the loss of her father in a very inverted succession, for he died about four years after her daughter, on the 6th of December, 1802; but the interval was brief indeed when she was again alarmed by the account of the dangerous state of her eldest daughter, who followed her sister prematurely on the 24th of March, 1803. So rapid was the progress of her malady that she died before her mother's return from Ireland, where the interests of the family had required

her exertions. Mrs. Siddons seems to have been long alarmingly depressed at this second string's being severed from the maternal bosom. The sublime and pathetic Young has given in his "Narcissa" what I know to be a just portrait of the person and the loss:

> "Song, beauty, youth, love, virtue, joy, this group
> Of bright ideas, flowers of paradise,
> As yet unforfeit! in one blaze we bind,
> Kneel, and present it to the skies; as all
> We guess of heav'n: and these were all her own."

But we are not left to imagine the sorrows of her parent, since — no matter for the motive which gave a private correspondence to the world — we have them expressed in her own language to one whom she long presumed to be her friend. I shall select a few sentences from the letters of Mrs. Siddons about this time, because we are too apt to consider those who delight us upon the stage as persons upon whom private life hardly can be allowed to attach, and who are to be occupied, alas! solely with the agonies of others. The tyranny of our amusements, the luxury of our taste for simulated sorrows, hardly allows the actual tears for her own to dry upon the cheek of the actress. In the theatre, too, property suffers, engagements must be fulfilled, and the true mourner must hasten to a counterfeit. The actor shares in the common sufferings of his kind with-

out the sacred indulgence of his grief, which decency commands in every other condition. But let us hear Mrs. Siddons herself:

"The testimony of the wisdom of all ages, from the foundation of the world to this day, is childishness and folly if happiness be anything more than a name; and I am assured our own experience will not enable us to refute the opinion: no, no, it is the inhabitant of a better world. Content, the offspring of moderation, is all we ought to aspire to here, and moderation will be our best and surest guide to that happiness to which she will most assuredly conduct us. If Mr. —— thinks himself unfortunate, let him look on me and be silent. The inscrutable ways of Providence! Two lovely creatures gone; and another is just arrived from school with all the dazzling, frightful sort of beauty that irradiated the countenance of Maria, and makes me shudder when I look at her. I feel myself, like poor Niobe, grasping to her bosom the last and youngest of her children; and like her, look every moment for the vengeful arrow of destruction."

The passage thus alluded to by Mrs. Siddons is in the sixth book of the "Metamorphoses:"

"Ultima restabat; quam toto corpore mater
Totâ veste tegens, unam, minimamque relinque,
De multis minimam posco, clamavit et unam."
— v. 298.

But the sequel was in mercy averted, —

"Dumque rogat, pro quâ rogat, occidit."

My fair readers must not be disappointed as to an English version of the passage, which is neither feebly nor inelegantly rendered by Croxall:

"The last with eager care the mother veil'd,
Behind her spreading mantle close conceal'd,
And with her body guarded, as a shield.
Only for this, this youngest, I implore,
Grant me this one request, I ask no more:
O grant me this! she passionately cries:
But, while she speaks, the destin'd virgin dies."

The relations of life are seldom changed without some injury to domestic peace. The ascendency of the husband is justified by the duties which are assigned him, and it is his pride to be the support of his family. The merits of Mr. Siddons as an actor had been at length so obscured by the talents of his wife that it did not consist with the interests of the family to allow him to continue on the stage. At one time he purchased into Sadler's Wells, and the concern was for some seasons successful; but the profits at length declined, and I believe when he quitted it on the whole it had been rather injurious to his fortune. This fate attended another speculation from which he had promised himself great advantages, and the greatest of all in the having an object to pursue with the hope of benefiting his family. Though he might properly have considered himself as most honourably occupied in being the best of managers of that fortune which now poured in upon them, he yet felt himself to be placed below the just point of ambition, and became somewhat impatient of what the historians call the crown matrimonial.

I know that he used to consider himself on some occasions neglected, and that he was deemed of slight importance compared with the object of universal attention, his own wife. Something of this necessarily adhered to their positions in the world; more, however, in the apprehension of hardly a blamable self-esteem. This unhappily produced in a most honourable and high-spirited man some inequalities of temper, which occasionally seemed harsh to a woman conscious of the most unremitting diligence in her exertions, and often endangering her health to secure, along with fame to herself, the present and future comforts of her family. Some expressions of her irritation upon such annoyances have been printed by the person to whom I have before alluded; and at length Mr. Siddons, after suitable arrangements as to the property, retired to Bath. But he retained at all times the sincerest regard for his incomparable lady, and proved it by the last solemn act of existence.

I have alluded to the tendency of her mind to retirement, and, like most great geniuses, she was at all times disposed to covet the real or seeming quiet of a country life. But her brother had now embarked himself in the property of Covent Garden Theatre, and her presence there was vitally important to him. She expresses her resolution to prolong the struggle of thirty years in consequence; and there is interest of no common order

in this devotion of herself to her brother's views in life when her own are closed.

We can recur on this subject also to her own expressions:

"Alas! my dear friend, what have I here? Yet here, even here, I could be content to linger still in peace and calmness. Content is all I wish. But I must again enter into the bustle of the world. For though fame and fortune have given me all I wish, yet, while my presence and my exertions here may be useful to others, I do not think myself at liberty to give myself up to my own selfish gratifications." Again, and more pointedly: "I shall leave this place (Banisters) on the 4th of next month (September, 1803), and will write again as soon as I can after I get to town: I shall have a great deal of business upon my hands, and upon my head and heart many imperious claims. I find it is utter folly in me to think that I am ever to live one day for myself while these various claims, dear and tender as they must always be, exist; nothing but my brother could have induced me to appear again in public; but his interest and honour must always be most dear to me."

In order to combine the severe losses of a domestic nature, I have delayed to notice a disagreeable occurrence which attended her tour to the sister kingdom at the close of 1802. Perhaps no actress was ever more persecuted by cabal than Mrs. Siddons. The reader has not forgotten the

old attacks on the subject of her acting or not acting for Digges and Brereton. He may, with myself, have had opportunities of knowing the warm and active benevolence of the Irish character. To insinuate, therefore, that an object of their highest admiration is cold in the cause of charity is with that nation sufficient to excite a feeling which is too impatient for explanation, and often injurious even from its virtue. The Dublin Lying-in Hospital is one of those institutions not so endowed as to be above the aid of a performance at the theatre; and it was asserted, on no foundation in the world, that Mrs. Siddons had positively refused to act for the tenderest of all claims that can be submitted to her sex. This charge had been got up with great knowledge of effect, and had been for some months ripening into mature mischief. At length the trustees of the institution thought proper to give a public contradiction to this aspersion upon the actress; they said: "That Mrs. Siddons had most certainly never refused to act for them, and indeed had never been requested to do so." The fact turned out to be that it had been proposed she should play a night for some one public charity, the choice for which to be, properly, at the option of Lady Hardwicke. Why the manager, who had himself proposed the matter to her, had allowed it to drop was best known to himself: he had to give his theatre for a night, and Mrs. Siddons had

consented to act, that is, to fill it, if he did. She saw the point quite in its true light, and though she had many objections to the conduct of the manager, addressed a letter to him, tending to put her character and conduct right with the public. She was never fond of such personal explanations in print, but the occasion seemed to demand a vindication of her outraged humanity, and her letter to Mr. Jones does honour to her understanding and her heart:

"DUBLIN, December 8, 1802.

"SIR: — I take the liberty of addressing you on a subject which has caused me much uneasiness. Public censure is, under any circumstances, well calculated to wound our feelings, but it is peculiarly distressing when it is heightened by injustice. That reports most injurious to me have been circulated can no longer be doubted when I assure you that I understand it is generally believed that I refused to play for the Lying-in Hospital. On this subject you will, I am sure, be as anxious to do me justice as I am solicitous to vindicate myself in the eyes of the public. I therefore beg leave to bring to your recollection that you did me the honour of calling on me at my house in Park Street last summer, when it was liberally proposed on your part, as it was most cheerfully accepted on mine, that I should perform for some charity. You also recollect that it was considered by us both as a compliment justly due to Lady Hardwicke that she should have the choice of the particular charity for which I was to perform; and you thought it likely that her Excellency would give her preference to the Lying-in Hospital. You also, sir, must remember that I was not only willing but desirous of exerting myself for the benefit of so laudable an institution.

"Why so amiable a purpose was not immediately promoted I cannot even guess; but sure I am that its postponement cannot be attributed to any backwardness on my part. The same motives which actuated me then are no less powerful now; and it will give me infinite pleasure, if, by the exertion of any powers I possess, I can be able to promote an important object of public utility.

"And now, sir, if I may be permitted to speak of myself as a private individual, I have only to regret the sad necessity imposed upon me of vindicating my character from the imputation of a failing as unamiable as, I trust, it is foreign to my nature. I regret that I should be constrained, from unfortunate circumstances, to endeavour to rescue myself from an obloquy which I hope I have never incurred by my conduct. I regret that the country in which I am obliged to do so should be Ireland. I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) "S. SIDDONS.

"*To Frederic Edward Jones, Esq.*"

Although Mrs. Siddons had thus devoted herself to promote her brother's interest, and transferred her attraction, which continued scarcely abated, from Drury Lane Theatre to Covent Garden, it was without any junction as to the property. The sixth purchased by Mr. Kemble was exclusively his own; and he paid down £10,000, in part of the £23,000, its estimated value, leaving his accumulating profits in Mr. Harris's hand to liquidate the remainder. But, though she chose to be there merely as an actress upon a salary, the alteration as to the house was productive of many comforts. Invio-

lable respect she was sure of everywhere, and her brother was the stage-manager also at Drury Lane Theatre during the greater period of her connection with that house. I never could perceive that she was more attended to by him than any other lady would have been, holding the same rank. He sometimes entreated the treasurer would let her have some part of her long arrears; but such offices he was disposed to render other persons equally, performers and authors. The superior comfort now was that all that uncertainty was at an end which disgraced the régime of Mr. Sheridan's house. The manager of Covent Garden Theatre was really a man of business, who did not consider himself entitled to delay, much less alienate, the stipulated payment for which he had received the valuable labours of his performers. I never knew a gentleman better calculated to be at the head of a theatrical concern than the late Thomas Harris, Esquire; and, fortunately for him, his power was not a matter that could be disputed, owing to a clause in the covenants of purchase; during his life the management vested solely in him, — the stage-manager acted under his authority. Mr. Harris's system of management was built on the two principles of variety and novelty, and he looked strongly to the commercial or profitable side of things. Perhaps he was not enough aware of his partner's real value; but of Mrs. Siddons he knew the

exact importance, — her wonderful talents, and the splendid train of admirers which would now be the ornaments of his theatre, and perhaps put a seal upon the doors of the rival establishment.

The very face of his house was expressive of his expectations. The enviable retreats of sixteen private boxes tenanted by the Northumberlands, the Devonshires, the Abercorns, the Hollands, the Egremonts, and so on, taken at a rent of £300 per annum, was a flattering earnest of what his new connection would achieve for him. Added to this, the grace of high rank and fashion, he was now about to place his theatre first in the scale of reason, from the superior power he possessed of presenting the standard works of our great poets. The Apollo had not yet sunk into the flaming ruins of Drury, but stood as if meditating his flight from a temple erected to his honour, but quite unfinished either within the walls or without.

It might have been expected that Covent Garden, proud of its great accessions in the whole of the Kemble family of tragic moment, would have opened with one of Shakespeare's tragedies strongly cast, "Macbeth," for instance, and struck the town with its full strength at first. But there were various reasons against it which respected the feelings of the rest of the company; and on the first night the new management was contented to let the house, in all its beauty and im-

provement, speak for itself, and Mr. Fawcett bespeak the public favour to their new commander of the stage by a liberal and well-merited compliment to the services of his predecessor. Mr. Kemble, accordingly, made his first appearance alone in "Hamlet," and Mrs. Siddons, like her brother, repeated her original début in town, and acted Southern's Isabella on the 27th of September, 1803.

There is sometimes a wild notion that the audiences of one theatre are differently affected from those of another; and some persons seemed alarmed at the result to Mrs. Siddons of invading a region of rather lighter amusement than the stage of Garrick. But her own identity was not surer than the feeling she excited; and unresisted passion stormed every breast within her new sphere of exertion. If I am not mistaken her pathos was even more profound than less; to which, indeed, her personal afflictions must have contributed. On the 6th of October she acted Lady Randolph, and her son, Mr. Siddons, was the Douglas, — Mr. Kemble took the part of old Norval. This was followed by Elvira in "Pizarro;" but to his other vices that adventurer now added drunkenness, and his representative, Cooke, being unable to speak the part, her son read it, and read it so well as to gain much credit by doing the friendly office.

The present was the age of revolutions. The

most surprising events had occurred on the stage of real life, and the mimic world followed the course which seemed to strike down all reasonable expectations. It might have been supposed that Mrs. Siddons and her brother had now established their tragic supremacy so as to "laugh a siege to scorn" — their proud citadel was taken by storm, and the assailant was an ignorant boy.

> "Quoniam medio de fonte lepôrum
> Surgit amari aliquid, quod in ipsis floribus angat."
> — *Lucret.* Bk. 4. v. 1127.

But the triumph of Covent Garden had not been complete even in their first season. One might have imagined that Drury Lane Theatre would suffer dreadfully by such a diminution of its strength. By no means. Bannister took the management, and his receipts averaged £242, 2*s.* 8*d.* nightly through the season. The causes of this singular result were three: "The Caravan," "Cinderella," and "The Soldier's Daughter." The first of these had no greater principle than the making a Newfoundland dog jump into real water, contained in a tank upon the stage, to recover Julio, the son of the Marchioness of Calatrava, plunged from a precipice into the river below on account of her resistance to the passion of the Governor of Barcelona. It was, what an afterpiece may very properly be, an ingenious trick, surprising by its novelty. It was repeated

forty times during its first season. The second of these charmers was one which secured us all originally in the nursery; and now, mingling mythology with Mother Goose, attracted the largest second price to the theatre that had been known. It was repeated fifty-four times during the season; or, to speak more correctly as well as favourably, between the 3d of January and the 11th of June. The third, a comedy written by Mr. Cherry, and beautifully acted by Mrs. Jordan, during its run on the first season, kept up by either "The Caravan" or "Cinderella," brought in twenty nights' performance the sum of £7,544, 14*s.* 6*d.* Thus, to use a favourite expression of Mr. Kemble's, "as it happens for ever in theatres, a lucky chance had turned up for them," and the Drury Lane people were not ruined, even with Kemble and his brother Charles, Mrs. Siddons and her most accomplished daughter-in-law, Braham, Incledon, and Storace, all at Covent Garden Theatre.

Here, though perhaps a little surprised, there was nothing that either Mrs. Siddons or her brother could regret: it is to the advantage of each theatre that its rival should flourish. It shows a full tendency of the public mind to the species of entertainment; the interest of the rivals forbids everything like indolence; the best strength is put forth; the sphere of attraction is enlarged. But the peculiar mania which seized

these islands for the performances of Master Betty is a thing quite unexampled in its extent, and his measure of success was due only to the most consummate excellence in the art. Unquestionably Mrs. Siddons in the summer of 1802, when she acted Elvira at Belfast, never suspected that she was then inspiring a mere child with an irresistible passion for tragedy; and that in two short years the most accomplished actor of the age was to be eclipsed by this meteor, which dispensed with all our usual attractions at both theatres, —

"And turn'd our sun to shade."

It must have needed philosophy of more than common power thus to give place to commercial advantage, and expect with calmness the returning reason of the town, enamoured of its own injustice, and elevating mere prematurity into prodigy.

There was one circumstance attended his performances which was visually absurd. I mean the palpable disparity as to figure and age; the absurd contests in which this child was made to hector, and combat, and conquer what he could hardly reach. This exhibition surpassed the folly of former ages from its singleness. The little aery of young eyasses, the children of Queen Elizabeth's chapels, were at least unmingled with bulkier matter; the best of them was only an Iülus among his playfellows, — comparative ages dis-

pelled no illusion when it was once admitted. But a Salathiel Pavy [1] among the Burbadges, and Taylors, and Lowins, of the Globe, what gallant of that astonishing period would have endured for a moment? By a contest with their matured competitors the children might seem, as Shakespeare says, "to exclaim against their own succession;" for we know that many of them grew up into ordinary players, and admitted among men, gave a delight more decorous, though less wonderful, than that which they had excited as children.

As to the young Roscius of 1804, Kemble knew exactly what was in him; and, perhaps, was not displeased to see the fool multitude deserting even Cooke himself for the youthful Betty. How long the spell might be expected to hold; when the stage should again be his own, and the hard fortune to be supplanted, which hung upon his exertions, be tired of further persecution, he might, in spite of his philosophy, anxiously inquire. Mrs.

[1] Salathiel Pavy had acted old men for three years with very uncommon skill, and died before he had completed his thirteenth year. Mr. Gifford, in a note upon the epitaph which Ben Jonson composed to his honour, observes, as he might be expected to do, the care taken of the education of these children of St. Paul's and the Royal Chapels; "they were opposed," he says, "only to one another. Nothing so monstrous ever entered into the thoughts of the managers of those days as taking infants from the cock-horse, and setting them to act with men and women." They had a minor theatre for one

"Parvola, Pumilio, χαρίτων ἴα, tota merum sal."

Siddons had been (worthily, I admit) long worshipped among the higher orders. What scenes of pale and flattering hypocrisy must have been acted when those who catch at every sort of distinction were obliged to exhibit themselves proud of following the boy Roscius, and hardly able to avoid decently, before the great woman, the hyperbolical nonsense which all ranks indeed slavered out, from morn to night, in his commendation! I do not feel quite sure whether it be not wiser to avoid the imputation of envy which sincere conduct is sure to excite; and, instead of attempting to throw impediment in the dance of folly around its idol, to assume that smile and good-humoured laugh which, in the late Sir Joshua Reynolds, passed with the critical for derision, and with the simpleton for congenial admiration.

I have it from unquestionable authority, that Mrs. Siddons disdained at any time to compliment the young hero; and being convinced herself that the effect was delusive, maintained a cold reserve upon the subject, and heard the absurdities in society with much equanimity. That it might strengthen her wish for retirement is likely enough; but, however we may learn to undervalue the public applause, it is difficult for one on whom it has been long bestowed, to bear the dreary vacuity of private life. La Vallière, driven from the embraces of Louis XIV. by the superior

charms of De Montespan, did wisely when she withdrew to the shelter of the cloister, which concealed at least the chagrin it might be unable to banish.

Mrs. Siddons was not called upon either to "pursue the triumph, or partake the gale." Mrs. Litchfield was selected by Mr. Kemble to act with Master Betty. Her figure did not rise to the grand and commanding; but she had a very clear and perfect tone of voice, and that accurate knowledge of the business of the stage which the occasion required. The list of Betty's characters during his first run was proper enough. The oldest character was Hamlet, who in the outset of the play is so young as to talk of going back to school again at Wittemberg, and yet at the grave of Ophelia is proved to have attained his thirtieth year. The business of the play does not occupy a year. Perhaps Shakespeare suited the age of his character to that of its representative: a further indication may perhaps be found in an expression of the queen mother during the fencing scene, "He's fat, and scant of breath;" circumstances which apply rather to the full habit of manhood than to that youthful figure described as "the glass of fashion and the mould of form."

From this and a thousand other instances of the great poet's carelessness and want of revising his play as a whole, the assertion of his player-editors seems, I confess, to me entitled to the fullest

credit: "that what he wrote came from his pen with so much easiness, that they scarce received from him a blot in any of his papers." He very probably sent his works to the theatre for study, act by act, as he composed them, and trusted to memory for keeping them consistent throughout. That different printed copies of the same play are more or less full and perfect proves nothing against this position; the printer exhibited, unauthorised, all that he could acquire at the time; when he augmented the copy, he did so, not because the author had composed additional passages, but in consequence of his having found access to the true and perfect original, by which the deficiencies of his former publication were supplied. I disbelieve all first sketches by Shakespeare.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE retirement of Mrs. Siddons at this period had a cause more distressing than the public delirium: she had a long and dangerous illness that confined her to her chamber, and hardly allowed her power to change her position; when recovered, she returned to Ireland, and performed with her wonted energy and popularity. The second season of the young Roscius lowered his pretensions; but, having made his fortune, he was now sent to college, and I presume the cultivation of his understanding did no great injury to his subsequent performances on the stage. The winter of 1806–07 once more beheld Mrs. Siddons and her brother acting with undisputed supremacy, and I do not recollect at any period to have more enjoyed their transcendent efforts. The great actress had become fuller in her person, and more majestic than ever. Her Volumnia, her Katharine, her Lady Macbeth, were at their *nil ultra*. She was no longer in danger of new studies, from which nothing was to be hoped; but when she chose to act, was followed, as the most accomplished of all actresses merited to be,

as the genuine interpreter of the inspired oracles of Poesy.

But a dreadful calamity was at hand, and the 20th of September, 1808, was marked by the conflagration of the theatre which she so much adorned.

The modern stage affects reality infinitely beyond the proper objects of dramatic representation. Muskets are fired, with their wadding to lodge, for aught anybody can tell, in some crevice; and at last, in the night-time, the lurking pest bursts forth, to the ruin of a stately building and half its neighbourhood. The drum that used to threaten with its empty ordnance the canvas walls of some fortified city must soon give way to the real implements of war; and the guardsmen who nightly act the heroic troops of all times and nations may march from their quarters to the playhouses, preceded by their own bands, and drawing their field-pieces to a boarded field of battle. The delightful odour of powder, mingling with that of gas, renders a theatre the most unsavoury place we can enter. Formerly the painted scene was a scene of battle, whereon immovable combatants suggested to the fancy of the spectator, and the prompter's troops behind contributed the vocal cheer to the shock of armies. We now fill the stage with something like a detachment; and, in the midst of confusion and noise, two unknown champions occupy the front of the stage by a display of the broadsword exercise,

and the sparks of their courage alarm the drowsy musician in the orchestra lest the blade itself should descend and "mar the pleasure of the time" it was trying to beat to his music.

It is in vain to dispute the inference from all this absurdity. The million will always be governed by the eye. In proportion as by over-attention to them the accessories become principals, the writer and the actor vanish together. Their art cannot exist without the full triumph of that art. The "thoughts that breathe, the words that burn," of the poet inform the features, inspire the tongue of the accomplished actor; together they have power beyond their originals, and the stage of Shakespeare and Siddons is more true to nature than history itself.

But the tide set now so strongly in favour of these improvements of dramatic exhibition, that after a decent interval of sorrow for their actual loss, and before the ashes of the late pile were well cold, the proprietors determined to erect an edifice of transcending magnificence, and turn their disaster into triumph. The first stone of the new theatre was laid by his present Majesty, then Prince of Wales, on Saturday, the 31st of December, 1808. Among the ladies who attended upon this occasion, Mrs. Siddons was placed where she could best see the important ceremony. She wore a plume of black feathers, forgetting the ominous foreboding of her own Isabella. The rain

descended in torrents, and Kemble would not abate one jot of punctilio on such an occasion, but, like King Lear, bareheaded, and in white silk stockings, —

"Endur'd the pelting of the pitiless storm."

Mrs. Siddons, who knew he had just left his room, after a month's confinement, was perfectly in agony at this exposure of his person. His venerable partner, Mr. Harris, on that day laid in the foundation of a paralytic disorder which conducted him to his grave. My superstition remembered the war of elements that had commemorated the preliminaries of peace with France a few years back, and would not countenance the joy that looked so extremely like sorrow. I shrunk away from the dreary scene with a damp upon my spirits that I did not care to spread among my friends. As to my dear Kemble, through this whole business he trod in air. The amazing structure, the vast patronage, the private boxes, the now unquestionable increase of prices, filled his mind with not unreasonable hopes of affluence and triumph. Perhaps Mrs. Siddons herself expected to be teased by the fashionable world to use her influence with her brother that their application for the luxuries of the new theatre might obtain a friendly preference.

There was at this time but little expectation that our great actress would herself act in the new theatre. She really wished to retire. But I must

not anticipate. Scarcely did the solidity of Mr. Smirke's edifice begin to show itself in progress, when the metropolis was called, by the conflagration of the other house, to express no common wonder and even alarm at the fate which joined them in equal ruin. So speedy a coincidence, as it defied the doctrine of chances and the probabilities of life, so in the breasts of persons suffering by the system of irregularity at that house it begot a suspicion that the destruction of Drury Lane Theatre was wilful. One person was frequently named as the contriver of the whole mischief, and he, certainly, was a man who possessed the entire means in himself; but his very accusers could assign no motive to such an action.

It was on the 24th of February, 1809, that this beautiful, light, and yet vast work of Mr. Holland, unfinished externally to the last, was consumed by fire. It was a more regular and splendid conflagration than that of Covent Garden Theatre, and exhibited by twelve o'clock at night the sublime because terrible view of one unbroken body of flame for the space of at least four hundred and fifty feet. Some of the performers, among whom was my friend Charles Mathews, at a personal risk sufficiently alarming, threaded the suffocating maze of passages and bore away their personal property. Mrs. Jordan found some kind help in this disaster, and lost, I think, little or nothing. Sheridan had used his theatre as a store to deposit the spoils of

office; and by this fire was destroyed the whole of the furniture which adorned his house in Somerset Buildings, when he was for a short time Treasurer of the Navy. He was himself in the House of Commons when he received the disastrous intelligence, and he behaved with his accustomed fortitude. The sympathy of the House would have led the members to adjourn, but he refused such a personal compliment to his feelings; and only at the proper time could be prevailed upon himself to repair to the neighbourhood of his ruin, where he sat out the last appearance of conflagration. When the reader reflects upon the state of this great man's finances, the little hope he could entertain of his theatre's being rebuilt at all, or of its ever yielding an income to him again if it were, and is told that neither his fortitude nor his pleasantry abandoned him, he may suspect that wit has a buckler more impassive than adamant, and think him an object of envy in every condition of his fortune.

There is a relation of circumstances to each other, which is often only succession, sometimes cause and effect. Whether Drury Lane would have been safe had the Kembles and the Siddons remained there, we can form no probable solution: a glue-pot may boil over in one management as well as another. But, as they were the positive causes of "Pizarro's" being acted at the Covent Garden Theatre, the wadding of the Spanish sol-

dier indubitably could not have lodged in the flies, had there not been this call for firing his musket; and thus a whimsical friend of mine proved that the Kembles were the cause of this conflagration; but his argument has a longer train than he suspected, and as properly includes Mr. Sheridan, the writer, Mr. Kotzebue, the inventor, and even Pizarro himself, the conqueror of Peru. However sound the philosophy, on the present occasion it would be irreverent to proceed farther in this chain of causes; but Wollaston has made a noble use of this great position in the fifth section of his work, to which I would, for the highest of purposes, refer every reader.[1]

During the latter part of the season 1808–09, while the Covent Garden company was acting in the Haymarket, Mrs. Siddons announced some of her characters in the bills for the last time; but she yielded to the interests of the new theatre, and accepted an engagement at fifty pounds a week, terms both complimentary and just. There was no wantonness here of seeing how far liberality would stretch; the precarious tenure by which such excellence was held, after the steady exertions of thirty-six years, might have justified something even beyond this remuneration.

In accompanying Mrs. Siddons through her splendid career I have not often turned aside to consider other professors of her art, nor re-

[1] See "Relig. of Nature," page 114 of the edition 1759, 8vo.

vived my own uneasiness at the progressive losses of the stage. But, during the temporary sojourn of the Covent Garden company in the Haymarket, a retirement took place which, in the words of our memorable sage, once more really "eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure." I allude to the farewell acknowledgments of a gentleman whom I had the happiness to know, and long to esteem, the late unrivalled William Lewis, Esq. With a handsome fortune, the produce and the reward of unexampled diligence, steadiness, and principle, he determined to quit the scene while he was in full possession of its comic charm, and having for the last time indulged his spectators and himself in unbounded hilarity, finished by the excitement of their tears and his own.

It was on the 29th of May, 1809, that this great comedian appeared in Michael Perez, the Copper Captain of Beaumont and Fletcher, for the last time. The comedies of his own time were, perhaps, indebted to him for their success; but they are not so highly rated as to allow of an appeal to them as criteria of his talent. "Rule a Wife and Have a Wife" is likely to be a favourite in all ages, and until it becomes an opera, which, in other words, is until the characters make no pretence of being acted at all, there never can be a more diverting exhibition of this original than Lewis afforded. It is delightful to me to recall his

eager gullibility, his rueful change. The rich description of the mean lodging, where in truth Fletcher is all but Shakespeare, came from him in all the perfection of the art, — like the Don John of Henderson, where even the words themselves derived an extended power from the way in which they were spoken. I must instance in one passage where the actor really equalled the author:

"There's an old woman, that's now grown to marble,
Dried in this brick-kiln, and she sits i' the chimney,
Which is but three tiles rais'd, like a house of cards,
The true proportion of an old smok'd Sybil:
There is a daughter, too, that nature meant
For a maid-servant, but 'tis now a monster;
She has a husk about her like a chestnut,
With laziness and living under the line here:
And these two make a hollow sound together,
Like frogs, or winds between two doors that murmur."

But where he absolutely exceeded all expectation, even from spirits like his own, was in the first scene of the fifth act, where he meets with Cacafogo, who has been cozened too, and by a woman also (indeed the same woman); the convulsive joy of his laugh, frequently renewed, and invariably compelling the whole audience to a really painful sympathy, was one of the most brilliant exploits of the comedian. If we ever die of excessive laughter, I should imagine such must be the expression of that uncontrollable emotion, where the

fancy lords it over the whole animal economy, and the strings of life itself crack under the dangerous enjoyment.

However, his reign of gaiety was at length to close, and Mr. Lewis advanced to utter the only unwelcome expressions that his friends and admirers ever heard from him. It is usually ridiculous when the performer employs some versifier, uninterested beyond the sound of his own lines, to string the commonplace acknowledgments and figures together which he is to deliver to his patrons; and there can be but little variety thrown into similar thanks for similar benefits in either verse or prose. But there is a charm in even premeditation when it looks spontaneous, and the language of real life should sometimes be heard from the stage. On the present occasion Mr. Lewis spoke as follows:

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: — I have the honour of addressing you for the last time. This is the close of my theatrical life, and I really feel so overcome by taking leave for ever of my friends and patrons that, might it not be deemed disrespectful or negligent, I could wish to decline it; but it is a public duty which I owe, and I will attempt to pay it, conscious that I shall meet your indulgence: for when I remind you that I have been thirty-six years in your service, and cannot recollect to have once fallen under your displeasure, my dramatic death cannot be met by me without the strongest emotions of regret and gratitude.

"I should offer my acknowledgments for innumerable acts of kindness shown to my earliest days, and your yet

kinder acceptance of, and partiality shown to, my latest efforts: all these I powerfully feel, though I have not the words to express those feelings. But while this heart has a sensation it will beat with gratitude. Ladies and gentlemen, with the greatest respect, and (if you will admit the word) the sincerest affection, I bid you farewell."

"Some natural tears he dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before him, where to choose
His place of rest, and Providence his guide."

Mr. Lewis had rather a spare habit of body, but seemed always in possession of even florid health, to which his daily walk for a couple of hours greatly contributed. His figure, from his deportment, might be deemed even elegant in the scenes of comic luxuriance; when he exceeded all the common bounds set to human action, he never was vulgar, no, not for an instant. Where all the manners are diverting, it is difficult to sketch any in very bold relief; but he had one peculiarity, which was the richest in effect that could be imagined, and was always an addition to the character springing from himself. It might be called an attempt to take advantage of the lingering sparks of gallantry in the aunt, or the mother of sixty, or the ancient maiden whom he had to win, to carry the purposes of those for whom he was interested. He seemed to throw the lady, by degrees, off her guard, until at length his whole artillery of assault was applied to storm the struggling resistance; and the Mattockses and the Davenports of

his attentions sometimes complained of the perpetual motion of his chair, which compelled them to a ludicrous retreat, and kept the spectator in a roar of laughter. In short, whether sitting or standing, he was never for a moment at rest; his figure continued to exhibit a series of undulating lines, which indicated a self-complacency that never tired, and the sparkling humour of his countenance was a signal hung out for enjoyment that it would have been treason against human happiness to refuse to obey.

To write for Lewis could hardly be said to be difficult. Fill his heart with generosity and his head with frolic; let him enter every man's house and inquire the concerns of every living soul of both sexes; turn him loose to do all that he fancies; let him plunge into ridiculous disaster, and be relieved only by improbability; make him, in a word, the harlequin of modern comedy, and only take care that the less mercurial personages of the play do not spoil any of his leaps, and the business is achieved.

But all this was personal to the actor, and so absolutely was this the case that, because Lewis himself was to be exhibited, the comedies were never much varied; and, like an adventurer on the greater stage, the hero only passed under different names, but invariably played all his old tricks. I have never seen the characters of Mr. Lewis in modern comedy played by other actors,

and, therefore, am unable to state by what still more grotesque achievements they laboured to compensate the certain want of features, and whim, and absolute *gaieté de cœur* which so distinguished the lively original. Happily for the provinces, they have their own humourists, to whose style they have been long accustomed, and in sending them the better actor we might not always benefit the new piece.

Among the conversational excellences of Lewis was the power of telling a story well. He embellished the groundwork usually, I confess; but the additions were so rich and brilliant that it was impossible to desire the narrative other than he left it. There was a something high and gentlemanly in his course of life; he never degraded himself in dancing after patronage, but looked to his art and his industry as the sole means of attaining an honourable affluence, and he attained it. He fortunately burst away from the ensnaring property of the great London theatres, and consequently passed his latter days in comfort, and left his family wealthy.

The repose of Mrs. Siddons seemed now at some distance. She had agreed to open the new house on the 18th of September, 1809, in Lady Macbeth, and in dumb show passed through the character, hooted and reviled by an organised body of rioters, demanding to be admitted upon the old prices, and thence called O. P's. This was a sec-

ond attempt on the part of the proprietors of theatres to raise the rates of admission; and their opinions upon this subject, like those of other men, seem to have fluctuated with their interest. In the time of that miserable statesman, Lord North, those gentlemen were applied to on the subject of a tax upon the theatres, to be covered by a slight addition to the money paid at their doors. Their answer was most decidedly this: "that any alteration in such a matter must inevitably produce the absolute ruin of their properties;" and so America escaped the armed invasion of pantomime. When we think of such resources as these among objects of taxation, we are apt to fancy there must be some mistake in the history of later times, or that the term of a heaven-born minister was applied without much license to William Pitt.

It is not my design to go into the history of the O. P. war. My heroine was only not stricken down by the careless hostility of the rabble, who were inspired with a very remarkable hatred to the house of Kemble. Let me indulge myself with the recollection of her brilliant figure on this first night. She wore a dress fashioned after the bridal suit of the unfortunate Queen of Scots, and was a perfect blaze of jewels in the stomacher of the dress, as well as upon the hair and around her neck. Whether some exaggeration might not increase the cost of this dress, I know not; but the

theatre itself used to talk of some hundred pounds laid out, not only on that, but the regal dress of Macbeth himself.

One may now venture to speak on this subject with the freedom of history, and look into the secret causes of so remarkable a failure. The real fact is that too much was attempted at one time. The prospect before the proprietors was an entire monopoly of the public. Covent Garden Theatre was to possess every enviable convenience and display every kind of talent. The fashionable world has only one species of amusement at which they are not subject to the intrusion of strangers, — the Italian opera. It is a very dear privilege, and the space they occupy is little more than the carriage itself contains which conveys them to it. By devoting one entire tier to the nobility and gentry the proprietors of Covent Garden Theatre could offer to their patrons a box, accessible at any time, with an anteroom, when they chose to withdraw for conversation or refreshments; there was besides a general saloon for the occasional promenade of the privileged orders, and every arrangement made to render a public place of entertainment to them as select and private as their own residences; they quitted their boxes by exclusive staircases, and left the theatre from doors equally devoted to themselves.

Such was the attempt now made to secure to the drama of our country those who, it was imag-

ined, from the privilege rather than the performance, had hitherto patronised the opera; but if a fondness for Italian music, executed in the highest perfection, was still an object of solicitude, our great proprietors, or undertakers, were prepared to gratify that passion also; they had engaged Catalani herself, and were disposed to add the fascinating graces of the ballet to all the known captivations of either sense or sound. Had they at first opened at the old prices I am sure the other objects would have been carried. The fashion of life is essential to a theatre: — if we do not envy we admire, and it is not by his nature that man is revolutionary, — he seldom owns entirely to himself the allegiance he yet admits to great rank, great beauty, splendid dress, and services in the style of almost respectful veneration. If it be said that these high pretensions of the new theatre could only be triumphant by the greatest exertions on their part; that the splendid talent of Mrs. Siddons could not long be with them, and that a perpetual supply of novel excellence must maintain the ascendency they had gained; they might fancy, indeed might say, that they had no rivals in the market; that the Opera House was embarrassed with debt, and Drury in ruins, never probably to rise again; that from their credit as merchants they could almost always obtain any sterling attraction or object of caprice; and that, now they had secured the leading nobility of the land, it was

quite certain that the gentry and inferior orders would choose to be where the best company was assembled.

I remember from the first, however, of the conflict, Catalani was the grand theme of discontent; and we heard of native talent from the rioters, though they would not allow us to hear it from the stage. Poor Mrs. Dickons was ridiculously singled out for an object preferred to the great charmer. A finished singer she unquestionably was, and probably read music with facility that the lovely Italian would have needed to study; but we sometimes respect what we cannot love: the singer may be as true as the notes themselves before her, and more full of graces, though to delight may be for ever unattainable.

For a few nights the principal object seemed to be to riot, no matter about what. As the business proceeded it acquired heads to reduce the whole to system, and the lovely elements of Jacobinism covered the fronts of the boxes with placards by the foot, and added a band of suitable instruments to the discordant braying of their champions. Law was bound hand and foot in its own forms, and could only refer the proprietors to "the coming on of time." The lesson of Macbeth had not been lost upon them. Among the most deadly weapons in the armory of the assailants hypocrisy was soon discovered. "The theatre was a licensed brothel, and the private boxes the impure styes of aban-

doned titled sensuality." This happy thought absolutely ruined the whole concern. Gibbon has admirably expressed what followed such a hint: "The coldest nature is animated, the firmest reason is moved by the rapid communication of the prevailing impulse; and each hearer is affected by his own passions and by those of the surrounding multitude." The ravers about indecorum, who libelled the female nobility by thus suggesting impracticable depravity, were sitting with declared profligacy by their own sides; or walking in the lobbies with the licensed traders in prostitution, insulting everything decent in their own rank. After sixty-seven nights of outrage, thin houses, and exhausted spirits, the contest thus closed: the price to the boxes became seven shillings, that to the pit remained at three shillings and sixpence; the private circle was opened to the public to the full extent of the semicircle, and the property boxes became so limited in number as to defeat entirely the object of their erection.

There was that respectful attention to Mrs. Siddons during this whole business, that through two volumes of trash collected upon the subject, her name is not mentioned; they did not desire her to act where she could not be heard, and, being out of their sight, the rioters had nothing to remind them of her existence. The entrance of Charles Kemble was a favourite signal to renew the assault. I have said that hypocrisy mingled in this business,

and fanaticism, as usual, was not far off. A layman of the Church of Christ, alarmed at the destruction which theatres, it seems, brought upon pagan antiquity, on the 16th October, 1809, occupied the present *Times* with the most dreadful forebodings; and deprecates, that is, insinuates, the bringing the gray hairs of our sovereign with sorrow to the grave by our persevering to foster those establishments which even an archbishop of our liberal Church has called "the Devil's chapels." I quote but one sentence of his "drowsy hum," and hint with tenderness my apprehension that the imagination is not absolutely clean that expresses a devout alarm in the following terms: "Shall Christians revel in licentiousness and debauchery? Shall these associate with, or encourage by their presence, the most dissolute of both sexes? Let those who have cast off all fear of God, whose glory is their shame, who, being past feeling, have given themselves up to lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness, — let those frequent the theatre; they act consistently: but let no one who enters that sink of impurity assume the name of a Christian, nor dare to lift up the same heart that has been entertained with all manner of lewdness to that Being of infinite purity!"

It is not my intention to enter into the dispute between the Christian and the comedian. My charity, beyond that of Catholicism or Methodism, can think the characters perfectly compatible, and

feel the value of works of taste, and know their often unsuspected effect upon morals. But in utter scorn of modern calumny I deliberately affirm that the purity and utility of all spectacles must depend upon the presence of the higher orders. I would not sully my page with even the titles of productions at some minor theatres, which are calculated for the passions, and suited to the taste alone of the lower classes. There is a gross ignorance or indifference in certain situations as to our public amusements; instead of protecting such as alone have a tendency to refine the manners, they allow them to be invaded and impoverished, and overborne by every variety of obtrusive bad taste, bad language, and still worse principle. But I am drawn into the indulgence of the feeling excited while I am writing, and return, therefore, to the peace established between the high contracting theatrical parties on the night of the 15th of December, 1809. Many points were carried of great importance. "Magistracy may be defied;" "conspiracy may be permitted;" "fidelity may be punished;" and "the gentry of the land be both insulted and taxed by the same description of orators as represent the electors of Westminster in front of the hustings at Covent Garden." The unfortunate proprietors drank the "eisel" poured out to them, and swallowed as evidently a portion of the crocodile; and after begging pardon most humbly for endeavouring to preserve their prop-

erty, and discharging one of the most deserving persons in their theatre, they were suffered to resume the business of the season, and solicit the public to revisit what had been so recently the most disgusting of all houses.

Mrs. Siddons had opened the theatre on the 18th of September, 1809, and her second night of performance was the 24th of April, 1810, when she repeated her Lady Macbeth. Such an interval spoke loudly for the taste of a London audience. Now, however, points of moment having been adjusted, the great actress was allowed to speak in the magical *chef-d'œuvre* of Shakespeare without interruption, and the public came again into the regular enjoyment of the purest of its pleasures. She repeated this character on the 30th, and on the 2d of May performed Lady Randolph, in "Douglas," for the benefit of the Theatrical Fund.

I notice on the 23d of May one of the most attractive performances of the season. Fawcett selected for his benefit the play of "King Lear" — he himself took the part of Kent, a character which all who know him will be aware was exactly suited to him. As, however, he was new in it, Mr. Kemble rehearsed Lear with him; and when it was done, drew from the "man of his word" an exclamation of astonishment at the amazing power he had displayed. He frankly told the great actor that he had often seen him at night,

but never had thought him near his present excellence; never had himself been so moved as he then was. Mr. Kemble said that, however singular it might be, in Lear an audience quite unsettled him; the noise of the box-doors caught his ear, and routed all his meditated effects; and he found it absolutely impossible to do that at night which he had thrown out during the rehearsal in the morning.

The astonishing impression made by Garrick in Lear is well known, and the discipline into which he brought his stage business — I had almost said his audience. In his small theatre every individual could be well seen, and any noisy intemperance was removed in a moment. Conversation above a whisper was checked immediately, as indecent, while so great a man was upon the stage; and the necessity of profound silence during certain scenes introduced the custom of stationing what were called hush men in different parts of the house, who, by "histing along," as Milton has it, the, "mute silence" in the proper places, begot an awful attention in the audience, and left the full impression of his vast powers upon the suspended and chilled spectators.

I believe nobody ever took less pains than Mrs. Siddons to second her efforts on the stage by those ingenuous arts which, if they assist the performer, no less benefit the hearer. Audiences like ours are mixed up of such discordant materials:

a positive or a vague desire of amusement in some; vanity in others, with the true feeling of art, or without it; honest homely sense; refinement, and its excess, affectation; with an aimless hilarity, a restless joy, and much of a coarse and sluggard notice, moved more by its neighbours than the stage, — all this to be blended and bound together by the eye and ear attributes a something like magic to the actor's art.

The last season but one of our great actress, 1810–11, she performed nearly the whole of her characters, and never did she display greater dignity and force of mind. The singular lot of this consummate artist was to possess some compensation through life for every excellence that time could not but diminish. It would be absurd to say that her autumn excited the tears of her April, when her Isabella, her Shore, and her Belvidera were in their prime, and in my time were neither equalled nor approached; but I may reasonably inquire whether I myself have not lost more than the actress ever did, and, allowing much for the operation of age, I may also take into the account the frequent performances which I have seen of the same characters. But I incline to think that the Lady Macbeth, the Queen Katharine, the Constance, the Hermione, never suffered in the slightest degree down to their very latest repetition.

The year 1812 was to be distinguished by the

greatest loss of the tragic stage. The playbills now announcing the character of the night with melancholy accuracy, stated that it would be the last time of her ever appearing in it; and it seemed almost a withdrawing of the character itself from the stage. After some little fluctuation about the farewell part, it was properly settled to be Lady Macbeth; and on the 29th of June, 1812, being her own night, she took leave of the public after a very sublime performance of her greatest effort. Her nephew, Mr. Twiss, supplied the verses upon this interesting occasion, and showed how successfully he could assume the tone of a popular poet, for whose composition, indeed, it might be mistaken. I preserve what constituted the personal appeal, because the lines are very flowing and musical, and extremely well pointed to the object:

"Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
May think on her whose lips have poured so long
The charmèd sorrows of your Shakespeare's song;
On her who, parting to return no more,
Is now the mourner she but seem'd before,
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last
farewell!"

Ad captandum, Shakespeare was right here; but it was not by the charmed sorrows of Shakespeare that Mrs. Siddons established her supremacy; and

the oblivion thrown over the authors who wrote her Belvidera, her Shore, her Calista, and her Isabella covers very nearly all the tears she ever excited. "Be just, and fear not," is the recommendation of Shakespeare himself, and the line, with strict propriety, and equal feeling, might have stood thus:

"The charmèd sorrows of your native song."

For Shakespeare services were to be performed of a different cast, and in character infinitely more sublime, and they were rendered by her so as to become the despair of admiration.

As the audience dismissed the rest of the play, when the terrible night scene of Mrs. Siddons shut in, there was only to wait till she was ready to address them, which they did with complimentary patience; and her brother came on the stage to lead off that great partner of his toil, and by whom alone he could have accomplished the distinguishing object of his management. The retirement from what has been the source alike of fame and fortune may be a graceful, but is commonly an anxious moment. Five and twenty years earlier the historian of "The Decline and Fall," at the close of the same month, had written the last words of his mighty labour. His pen dropped a few reflections upon the state of his mind at that moment, full of truth and melancholy beauty; the reader may not be displeased to see

them here, and his fancy may apply them with strict truth to the noble actress whom Mr. Gibbon had so greatly admired and so constantly attended while in London: "It was on the day, or rather night, of the 27th of June, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden." (At Lausanne.) "After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent.[1] I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps, the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious."

Whether the great actress regretted or not the stated calls to exertion, I know not; but her kindness certainly, probably her taste, led her

[1] The classical reader may here suspect the influence of Homer to have suggested at least as much as the lovely scenery before the historian (see the close of the eighth Iliad); but perhaps the true reference may be to a similar passage in Doctor Johnson's "Journey to the Western Islands." — *Works*, Vol. viii. p. 255, edit. 1796.

the year following to act Lady Macbeth for the benefit of her brother Charles. In the year 1816 she performed Katharine once more for the same kind object; and had consented to repeat her Lady Macbeth on the 8th of June of that year, to gratify the Princess Charlotte, and her royal consort of Saxe-Coburg. The princess, though ill, at first imagined she should be able to attend; but her illness increasing, she was obliged to relinquish the design, and send notice accordingly to the theatre. At first the managers thought of changing the play; but conceiving that the public would suffer disappointment at not seeing Mrs. Siddons, she readily consented to act, and seemed to have lost little of her power in the four years of retirement from the stage.

One other exertion, a public reading, is attributable to a higher motive, — the desire to assist a family suffering under the premature loss of the father of it, a man of no mean powers either as actor or author. It was in the month of February, 1813, that this graceful aid to the widow of Mr. Cherry was rendered by Mrs. Siddons. That lamented actor expired on the 7th of February, the preceding year.

I know distinctly that the sensibility of Mr. Cherry was so hurt by some of that flippant stuff which dishonours the name of criticism among us, that he who had restored prosperity to Drury Lane Theatre by "The Soldier's Daughter" died of a

wounded spirit. I have at times heard something like a positive avowal from critics that "they wrote bitterly without spleen; that the public called for such an amusement, and that depraved appetites required poignant sauce."

"The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?"

The public readings from Shakespeare at the Argyll Rooms during two seasons proceeded, as I understood, from the twofold inducements of personal gratification and an important addition to her income. I was informed by Mr. Kemble himself that his sister was not in that state of affluence that she could live unemployed without some diminution of her comforts. I am quite sure that all the kind imputations of jealousy of any other attraction, avarice, and vanity were not the motives to the exhibition, which remains to be described in its style and its effects.

As to the style, nothing could be well more simple and yet dignified. In front of what was the orchestra of the old Argyll Rooms a reading-desk with lights was placed, on which lay her book, a quarto volume printed with a large letter. There was something remarkably elegant in the self-possession of her entrance and the manner in which she saluted the brilliant assembly before her. She assisted her distant sight by glasses, which she waved from time to time before her, when memory could not entirely be trusted, and,

like the Nereïdes that attended her own Cleopatra,

"She made their bends adornings."

Mrs. Siddons divided the reading into parts, for convenience, and was the whole time standing. She was led to and from the desk by a gentleman; but few gentlemen could gracefully accomplish the office. I would not persecute any little beings by naming them at the side of this noble and seemingly inspired figure; but I will remember that one night I had the pleasure to see this duty discharged by her nephew, Mr. Twiss; and when he gently resigned her hand to retire himself, his bow of affectionate respect to his illustrious relative was, to say all in a word, fully worthy of the occasion, and highly honourable to his taste.

The task to be sustained by the great actress presented extraordinary difficulties. In the first place, the plays of Shakespeare abound in male characters; the comparative number of his females is few. There is, therefore, an almost awkward effort of an elegantly dressed female to assume the vehement passions, coarse humours, and often unguarded dialogue of every variety of manly character; and it is, perhaps, easier for the male reader (at least it was to Le Texier) to aspire to the tender sweetness of the female character than for the lady (even Mrs. Siddons) to assume the passions or the follies, the agonies

or the enjoyments of the other sex. The wish of Cordelia to unsex herself, even for King Lear, could not have been recommended to her imitation; all that she attempted was in the strictest decorum, fitted to her condition and her knowledge. I heard her pass slightly over the lapwing Lucio in the "Measure for Measure," and he had lost all his grossness by the refinement of her delivery.

The reserve of her sex, too, greatly intercepted the variety which the great artist could unquestionably have bestowed upon these readings; but such a largesse would have somewhat savoured of mimicry, the lowest of all modes of representation, which requires but the mechanical part of man, and copies not so much the passion as the exterior manners. Such a style of exhibition is incompatible with dignity, and he who felt that upon the stage Mrs. Siddons was rather lowered by comedy was rather apprehensive than solicitous of those sallies of humour that burst from the manly desk of Henderson and Le Texier. It is said of Voltaire by an exquisite judge "that in his own theatre his declamation was fashioned to the pomp and cadence of the old stage, and he expressed the enthusiasm of poetry rather than the feelings of nature." The charm of versification forces something like this from every public reader of Shakespeare. The witches of Mrs. Siddons, accordingly, were poetical creations; the organs of

destiny, the ministers of darkness, beings resolving "into air, into thin air," and whose language seemed to wander from that element alone, unimpressed, at least, by any organs that were human. She divined a meaning in the poet beyond his words, and it was not like a creature of earth's mould that she delivered the following lines:

> "Double, double toil and trouble;
> Fire burn, and cauldron bubble."

On the stage, where the "Weird Sisters" are necessarily consigned to actual persons and positive habiliments, the charm is dispelled; for the imagination has no picture to paint, no mystery to develop.

However, I entirely concur with Capell in the following estimate of Shakespeare's witches: "With regard to the witches' persons, the poet's notion is uniform: his witches are the witches of his own time and country, without mixture of scaldic or of Roman ideas; bating that he borrows the name of 'Hecat' or 'Hecate' for the governing spirit, the 'mistress' of their enchantments, in two of his scenes, where the personage she exhibits has no image of the classical Hecate, but of the state of modern witchcraft."

In the reading of "Othello" the general opinion seemed to be that Mrs. Siddons threw the whole force into Iago, a judicious choice, because where the cause is displayed in its utmost irresistible

strength, the hearer's mind is as much subdued as Othello's, and agonies impossible for mere reading to express are admitted because they are imagined. Upon the recognition by the noble Moor of the practice under which he had fallen, the exclamation, "O, fool, fool, fool!" seemed to express all that sense of rashness, false inference, unguarded trust to appearances, unbounded love, and measureless despair which fill his mind at the moment when it is uttered. She has seldom been greater than she was at that moment.

Upon these and all occasions Mrs. Siddons was uniformly graceful. But she was not graceful by effort, and sacrificed nothing to become so. In this she widely differed from her brother, Mr. Kemble. I cannot think, however, that he sacrificed energy of action to grace. He rather sacrificed ease to attitude, and seemed fond of personal display; he would be on the parade when not called into the field. Points of force he had a peculiar alacrity of seizing, and an amazing power in conveying. It is by this salvo that I introduce the following anecdote, which I find in the *Quarterly Review*, of my life of that great actor.[1]

"There was also visible in Kemble's manner at times a sacrifice of energy of action to grace. We remember this observation being made by Mrs. Siddons herself, who admired her brother in general as much as she loved him. Nor shall we easily forget the mode in which she illustrated

[1] No. lxvii. p. 216.

her meaning. She arose and placed herself in the attitude of one of the old Egyptian statues; the knees joined together, and the feet turned a little inward. She placed her elbows close to her sides, folded her hands, and held them upright, with the palms pressed to each other. Having made us observe that she had assumed one of the most constrained and therefore most ungraceful positions possible, she proceeded to recite the curse of King Lear on his undutiful offspring in a manner which made hair rise and flesh creep, and then called on us to remark the additional effect which was gained by the concentrated energy which the unusual and ungraceful posture in itself implied."

The reviewer himself is entitled to every attention from me: he will receive the few remarks that follow in the cordial spirit with which I am sure they are written. In the first place, then, I do not believe that any part of their delight (a severe delight) resulted from the concentrated energy of introverted toes and elbows pinned to the sides, however "unusual and ungraceful." There would have been more energy — ay, concentrated energy, too — if the figure had been thrown upon its knees and the hands clasped and convulsively drawn home to the bosom, which, permit me to observe, was the energetic and graceful attitude of Mr. Kemble when pronouncing that curse which harrows up every heart. As far, however, as this Egyptian figure folded the hands and pressed the palms to each other, I may be permitted to observe that it was certainly neither unusual nor ungraceful, but in fact

exhibited the common and most natural sign of supplication; and this, in fact, was the reason for selecting the attitude in question.

In my opinion the admiring theorists were overwhelmed by quite other forces. The "hair rose and the flesh crept" [1] at the agonised countenance that glared before them; at the mingling awful and piercing sounds that conveyed the execrations invented by Shakespeare:

> "Hear, Nature, hear!
> Dear goddess hear! Suspend thy purpose, if
> Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful!
> Into her womb convey sterility!
> Dry up in her the organs of increase;
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
> And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her!"

I think I can be quite sure that while the great Egyptian uttered these lines the hearers could be at no leisure to examine whether her arms had never quitted their bondage, or the feet recovered a position to which they were certainly more accustomed, energetic as it must be confessed they always were, in common with the rest of that dignified and perfect anatomy.

[1] When I read in the *Review* the words "made hair rise and flesh creep," I could not but fancy the phrase to have wandered from the "Minstrel of the Borders," whose hand also I recognised placing the "single feather of an eagle" in the bonnet of Kemble or Macbeth: they were identified to me.

Nor are grace and energy of action at all opposed to each other. Constraint, affectation, mannerism are the great foes alike to both. Through the whole range of my stage recollections the most energetic things were at the same time the most truly graceful. Think of all the grand points in either brother or sister, and you will find the consent of grace and energy invariable. When the true artist is really up to the great occasion before him, the energy propels his frame to the right position, and that speaking index, the hand, announces the graceful triumph. Look at Mrs. Siddons herself in Katharine: "Lord Cardinal! To you I speak." Can you survey the energy and overlook the grace? Look at the oath in the "Trois Horaces" by David, and bow before the union of the two great principles.

But to close with the recitations, or readings, to whichever class the beautiful efforts of Mrs. Siddons are assigned. For the sake of any future exhibition of this sort I will notice one happy effect, accidental or designed (probably the latter), which should invariably enter among the preparations of the apartment. A large red screen formed what painters would call a background to the figure of the charming reader. She was dressed in white, and her dark hair *à la Grecque* crossed her temples in full masses. Behind the screen a light was placed, and, as the head moved, a bright circular irradiation seemed to wave around

its outline, which gave to a classic mind the impression that the priestess of Apollo stood before you uttering the inspiration of the deity in immortal verse. But such oracles have long been dumb.

"Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine;
No nightly trance, or breathèd spell
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell."

Her noble figure on such occasions may be accurately conceived from Sir Thomas Lawrence's whole-length of Mrs. Siddons reading her favourite poem, the "Paradise Lost." The picture was painted for her friend Mrs. Fitz-Hugh, and is a very sublime effort of the great artist.

Perhaps I ought not to quit my subject without trying the effect of the pen in delineating the person of Mrs. Siddons, and the charm that certainly accompanied her through every era of her public life. It is fortunately done to my hands by a foreign writer of her own sex, and I shall annex it in the original language, claiming only the praise for first presenting to the British nation so eloquent a description and so admirable a likeness:

"Elle était grande et de belle taille, mais de cette grandeur qui n'épouvante point, et ne sert qu'à la bonne mine. Elle avait le teint fort beau, les cheveux d'un châtain clair, le nez très-bien fait, la bouche bien taillée, l'air noble, doux, enjoué, modeste, et pour rendre sa beauté plus parfaite, les plus beaux yeux du monde. Ils étaient

noirs, brillants, doux, passionnés, pleins d'esprit. Leur éclat avait je ne sais quoi qu'on ne saurait exprimer. La mélancolie douce y paraissait quelquefois avec tous les charmes qui la suivent. L'enjouement s'y faisait voir à son tour, avec tous les attraits que la joie peut inspirer. Son esprit était fait exprès pour sa beauté, grand, doux, agréable. Elle parlait juste et naturellement, de bonne grâce et sans affectation. Elle savait le monde et mille choses dont elle ne faisait pas vanité. Elle avait mille appas inévitables; de sorte qu'unissant les charmes de la vertu à ceux de la beauté et de l'esprit, on pouvait dire qu'elle méritait l'admiration qu'on eut pour elle."

The reader will be delighted, I have no doubt, with so fine a likeness, and require only to be told the name of the fair and eloquent writer. But it is with pride and pleasure I inform him that for this portrait Mrs. Siddons never sat, however striking the resemblance. It is the sketch, still, of one of the greatest and best of women, — of Madame de Maintenon, by her friend Mlle. de Scudéry.

I have now conducted this great performer through the whole of her professional existence, and if I could flatter myself that I had fully accomplished my design, have delivered to the world a monument to her honour.

But no one can be more sensible than myself that our wishes are the children of the imagination, and that their execution must be bounded by our power.

THE END.

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